Summer 1964

Revolt and compromise: Steinbeck's characters and society

James Randolph Fitzgerald

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
REVOLT AND COMPROMISE:
STEINBECK'S CHARACTERS AND SOCIETY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
James Randolph Fitzgerald
August 1964

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
VIRGINIA
Approved for the Department of English

and the Graduate School by

[Signature]
Director of Thesis

[Signature]
Chairman of the Department of English

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School
This thesis is a study of John Steinbeck and his treatment of various types of people in modern civilization and their reactions to this civilization. It is intended to show Steinbeck's personal hatred for the stilted values of the middle class and his love and admiration for the more natural codes of the lower classes.

It is also intended to show where these characters either fail or succeed in their relations with the world outside of their own smaller groups.

The characters are divided into four main types: (1) those characters who have succumbed to the temptations of a materialistic society; (2) those characters who have attempted complete withdrawal from modern civilization; (3) those characters who struggle to gain a place in the world outside their own little groups and fail; and (4) those characters who make some concession to civilization and who succeed both in society's eyes and in Steinbeck's eyes.

Steinbeck is bitter against the first group because its members are content with their mediocrity, and because they have become stagnant in thought and deed.

The second group Steinbeck loves for its individualism and for the ability of its members to withstand the temptations of materialism, but at the same time he berates them for running away from any kind of responsibility.

Steinbeck has great compassion for the people in the third group, but he realizes that their suffering cannot be avoided unless our whole system of society is radically changed.
Steinbeck admires the members of the fourth group because they successfully adapt themselves to modern civilization without giving up their individualism or falling prey to materialism.

Before examining the characters, it is necessary to explain a few terms: The word *natural* is generally used in this paper to describe the impulsive, free-living actions of many of Steinbeck's favorite characters. These actions are unrestrained, typifying the spirit of freedom and individualism in a Steinbeck hero and contrasting the nervous, stilted actions of the artificial middle class which Steinbeck dislikes. The term *nonteleological thinking* implies a reasoning process by which the questions *how, when, and where* are answered, but never the *why*. Steinbeck explains this in his *Sea of Cortez*:

In their sometimes intolerant refusal to face facts as they are, teleological notions may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change conditions which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding-acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change which may still be indicated. Nonteleological ideas derive through "is thinking," associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it. They consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than as results; conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all-important prerequisite. Nonteleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually "is"—attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what or how*, instead of *why*.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. BABBITT REVISITED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ROUSSEAU IN MONTEREY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. IN HOPEFUL BATTLE</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. &quot;THE PEARLS&quot;</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
BABBITT REVISITED

The only villain in a Steinbeck story is the successful middle-class businessman—the sterile status-seeker who has willingly succumbed to materialism and thereby lost the meaning of life. As cited by critic Frederick Bracher, "The middle class, Steinbeck seems to be repeating in his novels, has abandoned its versatility, and its values are atrophied into a sluggish desire for comfort and security." Steinbeck ridicules this middle class collectively in The Grapes of Wrath, and in later works scorns its members individually with such portraits as Mr. and Mrs. Elliott Pritchard in The Wayward Bus, the unnamed doctor in The Pearl, Mr. Baker in The Winter of Our Discontent, and Mr. Edwards in East of Eden. In all cases, Steinbeck finds his villains small and contemptible while they find themselves "the Best People on Earth." In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck describes the middle-class tourists:

The big cars on the highway. Languid, heat-raddled ladies, small nucleuses about whom revolve a thousand accouterments: creams, ointments... coloring matter... to change the color of hair, eyes, lips, nails, brows, lashes, lids. Oils, seeds, and pills to make the bowels move. A bag of bottles, syringes, pills, powders, fluids, jellies to make their sexual intercourse safe, odorless, and unproductive, ... Lines of weariness around the eyes, lines of discontent down from the mouth, breasts lying heavily in little hammocks, stomachs and thighs straining against cases of rubber. And the mouths panting, the eyes sullen, disliking sun and wind and earth, resenting food and weariness. ...

Beside them, little pot-bellied men in light suits and panama hats; clean, pink men with puzzled, worried eyes, with restless eyes. Worried because formulas do not work out; hungry for security and yet sensing its disappearance from the earth. In their lapels the insignia of lodges and service clubs, places where they can go and, by a weight of numbers of little worried men, reassure themselves that business is noble and not the curious ritualized thievery they know it is; that businessmen are intelligent in spite of the records of their stupidity; that they are kind and good and charitable in spite of the principles of sound business; that their lives are rich instead of the thin tiresome routine they know; and that a time is coming when they will not be afraid any more.2

There is an episode in The Grapes of Wrath in which two such tourists come into a roadside diner and order a coke and complain about its being too warm, waste six napkins, and leave. Immediately after these two leave, some truck drivers come in, play the jukebox and the slot machine, order pie and coffee, coax the waitress to let a starving family have a fifteen-cent loaf of bread for a dime, and then go, leaving fifty cents apiece for their own fifteen-cent checks. The second scene is a pleasant one and a pleasant contrast to the first. The strength of the episode lies in the comparison of the superior attitude of pink little men with sterile wives to natural man who has no pretenses about himself and his life.

One of the migrants in The Grapes of Wrath tells a story about a rich man, a "fat, soft man with mean little eyes," who had a million acres, yet who was consumed with a fear of death, but had no happiness in life. Tom Joad contrasts this man's fears and misery with Grampa Joad's fearlessness at facing death and the joy the old man found in defying it.

Casy tries to explain to the others how this could be so: "If he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich . . . not rich like Mis' Wilson was when she give her tent when Grampa died." Casy has "never seen nobody that's busy as a prairie dog collectin' stuff that wasn't disappointed."

A perfect example of a man "poor inside hisself" is "r. Pritchard, the Babbitt-like character of The Wayward Bus:

Mr. Pritchard was a businessman, president of a medium-sized corporation. He was never alone. His business was conducted by groups of men who worked alike, thought alike, and even looked alike. . . . Wherever he went he was not one man but a unit in a corporation, a unit in a club, in a lodge, in a church, in a political party. His thoughts and ideas were never subjected to criticism since he willingly associated only with people like himself. He read a newspaper written by and for his group. The books that came to his house were chosen by a committee which deleted material that might irritate him. He hated foreign countries and foreigners because it was difficult to find his counterpart in them. He did not want to stand out from his group.

Mr. Pritchard functions in the business world and the social world by following rules and using little tricks necessary to advance his position in both cases:

Mr. Pritchard had a whole series of tactics for getting on with people. He never forgot the name of a man richer or more powerful than he, and he never knew the name of a man less powerful. He had found that to make a man mention his own name would put that man at a slight disadvantage. For a man to speak his own name made him a little naked and unprotected.

__________________________

3Ibid., pp. 183-184.
5Ibid., p. 152.
Pritchard is especially zealous in his awareness of status symbols.

One of their most prized possessions is Mrs. Pritchard's "three-quarter length black fox coat":

It was his habit to shepherd this coat, to help his wife on with it and to take it from her, and to see that it was properly hung up and not just thrown down. He fluffed up the fur with his hand when it showed evidence of being crushed. He loved this coat, loved the fact that it was expensive, and he loved to see his wife in it and to hear other women speculate upon it. Black fox was comparatively rare, and it was also a valuable piece of property. . . . It placed them as successful, conservative, and sound people. You get better treatment everywhere you go if you have a fur coat and nice luggage.  

Even an ulcer can be turned into a status symbol:

Charlie Johnson said he must have an ulcer, and Charlie was pretty funny about it. He said no one under twenty-five thousand dollars a year got an ulcer. It was a symptom of a bank account, Charlie said. And unconsciously, Mr. Pritchard was a little proud of the pain in his stomach.

In a thought-provoking discussion of *The Wayward Bus*, Peter Lisca divides its characters into three groups: Those who are saved, those who are in purgatory, and those who are damned. On the list of the damned, Mr. Pritchard ranks first, mainly for being a "hypocritical prude." His insincerity and hypocrisy are shown in nearly every facet of his relations with others.

Practically all of the conversations between Pritchard and the other passengers on the bus center around his business and the place he might have in it for "enterprising" persons, ones "with some get-up-and-go."

---


Many of these "business" discussions are actually fronts to deceive himself and the other party into believing that Elliott Pritchard is really a very moral and honest man with genuine, good intentions. Such a subterfuge occurs when he tries to seduce the blond stripper, Camille Oakes, a fellow passenger on the bus:

Miss Oakes, . . . I've been thinking, and it occurred to me that you might like to listen to a little business idea I had. I'm president of quite a large corporation, you know, . . . and a man in my position has to look ahead and plan. Now, technically, I'm on a vacation. . . . Vacation--I wonder what a real vacation would be like? . . . Now the main raw product of a successful company is human beings, . . . I'm always looking for human beings. You can get steel and rubber any time, but brains, talent, beauty, ambition, that's the difficult product. . . . I'll come to the point. I want to employ you. That's as simply as I can say it. . . . You could become--well, you might even become my personal secretary.9

When Camille candidly refuses his offer and tells him that she knows exactly what he's up to, Mr. Pritchard becomes flustered and highly indignant: "I hadn't thought of any of these things. I was just trying to offer you a job. You don't want it--all right. There's no reason to be vulgar about it. There is such a thing as being a lady." Pritchard has convinced himself at this point that his intentions were most assuredly pure and honorable, and he feels deeply wronged at Camille's suspicions.

Pritchard employs his hypocritical rationalization again in a discussion with another passenger, Ernest Horton. He is mortified when Horton calls the idea of forcing a clothing company to buy the patent of a proposed product "high-class blackmail." Mr. Pritchard, under the deluded impression that he is providing a "service," replies indignantly, "I hope you don't think it's dishonest. I've been in business thirty-five years

9The Wayward Bus, pp. 283-287.
and I've climbed to the head of my company. I can be proud of my record." Pritchard's tactics are not considered unusual ones in the business world, but they are not completely ethical or completely honest. In fact, Mr. Pritchard cannot even claim to be an honest man following a dishonest code of success and survival; rather he is a dishonest man who helps to maintain a dishonest code. He is distinguished only through wealth, business success, and social position—all of these distinctions based upon no real contributions of value, but the results of a completely undistinguished and dishonorable life.

Judged by the materialistic middle-class circle of which he is a part, Mr. Pritchard is acceptable and successful, but judged by standards of decency and naturalness, Pritchard is barren and a failure. He is always ill at ease with persons outside his class, such as Alice Chicoy, the coarse wife of mechanic and bus driver, Juan Chicoy. This explains why Pritchard must spend every waking minute thinking only of business matters and of his own social group, and why he cannot even talk of anything except the business world. Mr. Pritchard is stagnant, functions only within his group, depends upon them for all his comforts, as well as for his self-assurance. This fact is brought to light by Ernest Horton's embarrassing questions, questions of which Pritchards do not like to think:

"You know, we're supposed to be a mechanical people. Everybody drives a car and has an icebox and a radio. . . . But let a little dirt get in the carburetor and--well, a car has to stand there until a mechanic comes and takes out the screen. Can you set the timer on your car? Suppose you had to stay out here for two weeks. Could you keep from starving to death. . . . Could you kill a cow? Could you cut it up and cook it?"

10Tbid., p. 87.
Mr. Pritchard lacks that important ability to adapt. In comparison to the Oakies in *The Grapes of Wrath* or to Juan Chicoy or other highly adaptable Steinbeck characters, Pritchard is socially superior but biologically inferior. Others must adjust to his way of thinking, because he certainly cannot adjust to theirs. A life of submission to the rules of society has cost him his freedom; he could no more act with spontaneity than admit that he does not. Bernice Pritchard picks out all of her husband's ties and the editorial pages pick out all of his opinions. His every action is according to schedule and code, and only with pain and incredulity can he recall that at the age of twenty, he voted for Eugene V. Debs and visited a "parlor house."

One of the chief contributing factors to Elliott Pritchard's stagnancy is his wife, Bernice. She could easily be the lady tourist described earlier in *The Grapes of Wrath*. She is detached and uninteresting, and participates only under septic conditions in life's natural pleasures such as sex and eating. Her breakfast eggs must be absolutely fresh, and she would certainly complain long and loud about a warm coke. She manages her house the same way Mr. Pritchard runs his business: "She ran an efficient, clean, and comfortable house and served meals which were nourishing without being tasty." She had read somewhere that spices had "an aphrodisiac effect" and never used them. Always the very proper lady, Bernice Pritchard was feminine and dainty and she dressed always with the hint of a passed period. She wore jabots occasionally and antique pins. Her shirtwaists had always some lace and some handwork, and the collars and cuffs were invariably immaculate. She used lavender toilet water so that her skin and her clothing and her purse smelled always of lavender, and of another, almost imperceptible, acid odor which was her own. She had pretty ankles and feet, on which she wore very expensive shoes, usually of kid and laced, with a little bow over the instep. Her mouth was rather wilted and childlike, soft, and without a great deal of character. She talked very little but
had in her own group gained a reputation for goodness and sagacity; the first by saying only nice things about people, even people she did not know, and the second by never expressing a general idea of any kind beyond perfumes or food. 11

Her sex life is staid, too. She had accepted "her husband's beginning libido . . . and then gradually by faint but constant reluctance had first molded and then controlled and gradually strangled, so that his impulses for her became fewer and fewer and until he himself believed that he was reaching an age when such things did not matter." 12 Women of lusty appetites she spoke of as "that kind of woman," and she was a little sorry for them "as she was for dope fiends and alcoholics."

Like her husband, she reveres material possessions, collecting gloves and rings as symbols of status. Also like her husband, she never had an original idea. "She met the ideas of other people with a quiet smile, almost as though she forgave them for having ideas. The truth was that she didn't listen." She lives by cliches: "Education is good. Self-control is necessary. Everything in its time and place. Travel is broadening." 13

Bernice Pritchard's one great obsession is an orchid house. To her an orchid house represented power and social prominence:

For a number of years she had wanted such a house. Ever since, in fact, she had seen an article in Harper's Bazaar about a Mrs. William O. Mackenzie who had one. The pictures had been lovely. People would say of Mrs. Pritchard that she had the darkest little orchid house. It was precious and valuable.

11 The Wayward Bus, p. 45.
12 Ibid., p. 63.
13 Ibid., p. 64.
It was better than jewelry or furs. People she didn't even know would hear about her little orchid house.14

Steinbeck never tells his readers whether Mrs. Pritchard gets her orchid house, but we can be sure that she does. Those who have neither wit nor grace nor intelligence nor imagination must have accumulations and symbols to secure their importance. The danger in stressing tangible possessions lies in the dehumanizing effect materialism and standardization can have on a person's life. There is an air of unwholesomeness about the Pritchards; even their infrequent sexual union sounds repulsive, because Mrs. Pritchard is only a defective organism of some sort, and Mr. Pritchard has been mechanized and dehumanized into a kind of automation.15

Reminiscent of Bernice Pritchard in many ways is Mary Teller in Steinbeck's "The White Quail." Both women exercise complete control over their husbands and withhold sexual privileges at will. Mary has a system of locking her door at nights when she does not wish to be bothered with her husband:

The lock was an answer to a question, a clean, quick, decisive answer. It was peculiar about Harry, though. He always tried the door silently. It seemed as though he didn't want her to know he had tried it. But she always did know. He was sweet and gentle. It seemed to make him ashamed when he turned the knob and found the door locked.16

Elliott Pritchard was a little ashamed of his feelings toward his wife, too. He blames himself for his wife's neurotic headaches:

14Ibid., p. 251.
15Bracher, loc. cit., p. 191.
Mr. Pritchard didn't bother her much in bed—very seldom, in fact. But in a curious way he tied up his occasional lust and his loss of self-control with her headaches. It was planted deep in his mind that this was so, and he didn't know how it had got planted. But he did have a conscience about it. His bestiality, his lust, his lack of self-control, were the causes. And he didn't have any means of saving himself. Sometimes he found himself hating his wife very deeply because he was unhappy.17

Like Helen Van Deventer in The Pastures of Heaven and several women in The Long Valley (notably the woman in "The Snake"), and like Mrs. Pritchard, most of Steinbeck's middle-class women are neurotic.

Mrs. Pritchard's neurosis expressed itself most frequently in her horrible headaches, which "twisted her face and reduced her to a panting, sweating, grinning, quivering blob of pain. They filled a room and a house. They got into everyone around her." A protective device, these headaches attacked her when things were not going right for her; she even used them as a device to "punish" Mr. Pritchard whenever he was displeasing to her. Mildred calls her mother's headaches "psychosomatic and psychotic," and she realized what a strong weapon they were for her mother to hold over the household:

Mildred still considered the headaches a weapon her mother used with complete cunning, with complete brutality. The headaches were pain to her mother, truly, but they governed and punished the family too. They brought the family to heel. Certain things her mother didn't like were never done because they brought on a headache.18

Steinbeck tries to show in his books and stories such as The Wayward Bus, "The Snake," "The Harness," "The White Quail" that neurosis is

17 The Wayward Bus, p. 211.
18 Ibid., p. 212.
a symptom of middle-class living and the middle-class spirit. None of his natural heroes and heroines who live close to the earth unencumbered by codes, controls, and chattels deny normal relationships of love and emotion. It is only with the people whose lives have trained them to put a dollar-and-cents value on everything that sex and love can be rationed out at the holder's discretion as reward and punishment.

Just as Mr. Pritchard sometimes hated his wife for her neurotic shortcomings which resulted in his own guilt feelings and repression, Harry Teller in "The White Quail" hated his wife, Mary, because of her complete absorption in her garden which shut him out of her life and left him a lonely man. Mary's garden was a marvelous place. It had flowers ranging in color "from scarlet to ultramarine." The lawn was beautifully landscaped, and her pool was peaceful and serene. Mary wanted to keep her garden absolutely unchanged; she wanted to keep out "the world that wants to get in, all rough and tangled and unkept." In building this sanctuary, however, Mary left out her husband and turned her garden into a place of security for herself alone. Unlike the Pritchards, Mary knew that something was wrong with her world and turned to a garden for escape, just as Mrs. Pritchard escaped unpleasantness with her headaches. Neither woman faced up to trouble head-on as Ma Joad and her kind would, but one went into hiding and the other refused to recognize what her problem was. Both women gained their peace—Mrs. Pritchard through the sacrifice of native impulse, and Mary Teller through the sacrifice of her husband.

When Harry's wife identifies herself with a white quail, Harry shoots the bird, saying that he was only trying to scare it away. Actually, his killing the quail symbolizes his desire to destroy Mary, to get back at her for denying him the things she has found for herself. These people are
all especially unfortunate in Steinbeck's eyes when they ignore human affection and decency and honesty in favor of some material goal or some false value.

Emma Randall in "The Harness" is another example of this neurosis. Though not a member of the middle-class society, she possesses the middle-class mind. Only her lack of wealth and her situation in a farming community rather than a business community separate her from the Pritchards of the world. She is ever conscious of outward appearances. She rules her husband with an iron hand, making him conform to her idea of what he should be and how he should look. She frowns upon drinking, eating excessively, and passion. She, too, goes into long periods of sickness when something threatens her control over her husband.

From outward appearances, it would seem that Emma Randall had done a good job of molding her man:

Peter Randall was one of the most highly respected farmers of Monterey County. Once, before he was to make a speech at a Masonic convention, the brother who introduced him referred to him as an example for young Masons of California to emulate. . . . From every gathering he reaped the authority that belongs to the bearded man. . . . He was tall and broad. He held his shoulders back as though they were braced, and he sucked in his stomach like a soldier. Inasmuch as farmers are usually slouchy men, Peter gained an added respect because of his posture. 19

The respect heaped upon him turns out to be ill-founded, however, because he actually wears a chest harness and elastic belt. Without these aids, he has the same ample-sized stomach that most men of his age had, and his posture was just as slouched as that of his neighboring farmers.

After his wife's death, Peter does throw the harness away, but he cannot escape the discipline imposed upon him during her life. Twenty-one years of conditioning have left him a lonely, broken man, all because of a neurotic, domineering woman who could think only of keeping up appearances, and his own manlessness in allowing himself to be ruled.

There are two other characters in *The Wayward Bus* who demonstrate lives ruled by cliches and conventions. Norma, the waitress, and Pimples, the boy-apprentice to Juan Chicoy, are by no means middle-class, but they are bound by many of the same sterile formalities and attitudes to which the middle class conforms. To Steinbeck, they are middle-class in spirit if not in reality.

Norma, like Mrs. Pritchard, has never experienced a genuinely satisfactory sex relationship: "The actual love-making in her life had been a series of wrestling matches, the aim of which was to keep her clothes on in the back seat of a car. So far she had won by simple concentration." She writes long love letters to Clark Gable, one of them twelve pages which began, "Dear Mr. Gable," and ended, "Lovingly, A Friend." She often shuddered to think that Mr. Gable might find out that she had written it." She lives for the day when Gable will walk into the lunch-room and take her away from it all. She slept with his picture and wore a gold wedding ring to bed. She kept the picture and the ring locked up in her suitcase in the day. Just as Mrs. Pritchard lived by trite little maxims, and Mr. Pritchard developed his opinions from the newspapers, Norma derived her life's philosophy from motion-picture magazines. Besides Clark Gable and her eventual moving-picture career, Norma was interested only in superficial personal beauty, to be gained by trite rules of grooming. Before she goes to bed, she practices her best vi-
vacious smile and runs the comb through her thin hair, brushing it "ten strokes on one side and ten on the other. And while she brushed, she raised and flexed the muscles of one leg and then the other to develop her calves. It was a routine recommended by a picture star who had never willingly taken any exercise of any kind but who had beautiful legs."

Pimples is even more enslaved to the cliches of the present-day world than Mrs. Pritchard, and is as much a rationalizer as is Mr. Pritchard. "Pimples took most of his ideas from moving pictures and the rest from the radio." Continually eating sweets which aggravate his already advanced case of eczema, Pimples rationalizes upon his weakness for rich foods: "It's rich in food energy. . . . Fellow's going to work, he needs food energy. Take about three o'clock in the afternoon when you get a let-down. Why, you need something rich in food energy."

Prey to the slick jargon of the advertising world, Pimples tells one of the bus passengers of his future plans: "I'm studying by mail. There's a big future in radar. Make up to seventy-five dollars a week inside of a year. . . . There's fellas that took that course that wrote in and said that's what they're making. . . . One of them is a district manager already, after one year." When the passenger asks, "District manager of what?" Pimples replies, "Just district manager. That's what he said in his letter, and it's printed right in the ad." This heartens Mr. Pritchard, who says, "Here was ambition. Not everybody was cynical."

Pimples has very successfully talked himself into believing that he is better off without an education. When someone suggests that he should go back to school, Pimples sneers in reply, "I don't want no fancy stuff. . . . Them college boys are just a bunch of nances. I want a man's life."
A new kind of Babbitt is the vicious, ruthless Mr. Baker in the latest Steinbeck novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*. All of his time is spent in various money-making schemes, involving more pressure than even a Pritchard would let himself use, and any low tactic necessary to his own advancement. He prods Ethan Hawley, the protagonist, to invest his wife's inheritance of $6,500 and to forget about his family's security for a while: "Forget them, I tell you--for their own good. There's some interesting things going to happen here in New Baytown. You can be a part of it." Like Elliott Pritchard, Mr. Baker clothes himself in hypocrisy. He believes his motives are lofty, and he can always cite service and progress and community pride as his reasons for venturing into deals. He uses these arguments to entice Ethan to join him in his latest venture: "Now, I know as a businessman that New Baytown is going to grow. It has everything to make it grow—a harbor, beaches, inland waters. Once it starts, nothing can stop it. A good businessman owes it to his town to help it develop." As Ethan points out, however, Mr. Baker is naturally helping the town develop at his own personal profit. Ethan realizes that

... stripped of its forward-looking, good-of-the-community clothing, Mr. Baker's place was just what it had to be. He and a few others, a very few, would support the town's present administration until they had bought or controlled all the future facilities. Then they would turn out the council and the town manager and let progress reign, and only then would it be discovered that they owned every avenue through which it could come.20

Characteristically tossing aside those who stand in the way of

this necessary progress, Mr. Baker gives whiskey to the alcoholic Danny Taylor, then tries to get the drunk's signature on a bill of sale for some land which is necessary for the "progress" of which Mr. Baker so frequently speaks. Like Elliott Pritchard, who reasons that he is actually performing a service for a company he would force into dealings with him, Mr. Baker also believes that he is doing good things for Danny, who is "not competent" to handle the property. He never considers how Danny himself might look at the matter: "The big meadow is mine and it's me. It's Daniel Taylor. Long as I have it no Christy sons of bitches can tell me what to do, can lock me up for my own good. It makes me a gentleman, lacking only the conduct of a gentleman." Danny's plea does not deter Mr. Baker from an unscrupulous attempt to secure his meadow, the only land level enough for an airfield. When Danny "passes out" before giving his signature in return for a bottle of Old Forester, Mr. Baker hints to Ethan that he might be forced to bring about legal measures since the drunken Danny is obviously incompetent to handle property, and it would be a blessing to name a guardian to look after his affairs for him. It would be "the kindest thing we could do for poor old Danny." Mr. Baker uses this same roundabout method in all his endeavors. Margie Young-Hunt, a single, attractive girl appraising her prospects knows his type well: "Sure, he had a wife, but Margie knew the Bakers of this world. They could always raise a moral reason for doing what they wanted to anyway."

Like Pritchard, Baker is regularized to the point of monotony and mechanization. He comes to work at exactly nine every morning. Ethan says, "Mr. Baker is so regular that you can hear him tick and I'm sure there's a hairspring in his chest." Like Pritchard, Baker is a mediocre,
unimaginative bore. His wisdom consists of clichés again, such as "I'm not a believer in idle money," and "There's too much petticoat in business today." Like Pritchard, Baker is considered by his colleagues as a capable and successful businessman. And again like Pritchard, Baker is much more of a profit-seeker than a progress-maker, though neither man can face the truth about himself and his life.

Another of Steinbeck's steady, dependable, respectable businessmen is Mr. Edwards in *East of Eden*, a man who "maintained his wife and his two well-mannered children in a good house in a good neighborhood in Boston." He also maintained a ring of prostitutes who made the tour of the small neighboring towns, changing inns every two weeks. This business was conducted privately and profitably with the sound business management of Mr. Edwards. Besides rotating his crew every two weeks, handling the hungry constables of the villages, hiring girls properly stupid and ones not too pretty, Mr. Edwards kept things running smoothly by disciplining his girls occasionally by means of striping, gagging, and horsewhipping anyone who drank, became unruly, or otherwise displeased him. His shrewd business head made him play the percentages and to "feel his way along." "He ran his business with a public accountant's neatness and accuracy."

Incapable of any real emotion, Mr. Edwards allows himself no love affairs: "As a matter of business he had learned so much about women that he did not trust one for a second." When he does let himself fall in love with the seemingly sweet Cathy Ames, he is in a continual state of frustration. His judgment is ruined, his knowledge is forgotten, and he fights back against these strange conditions by nearly killing her. Having rid himself of this irritation, he then goes back to his old way of life and licks his wounds:
No question was ever asked of him. After a time of sickness to which his wife ministered tenderly, he went back to his business and never again let the insanity of love come near him. "A man who can't learn from experience is a fool," he said. Always afterward he had a kind of fearful respect for himself. He had never known that the impulse to kill was in him. 21

Mrs. Edwards is another of Steinbeck's dull, static, middle-class wives, leading a restrained life not through restraint but through her own uninteresting nature. She was "persistently if not profoundly religious. She spent a great part of her time with the mechanics of her church, which did not leave her time for either its background or its effects." She accepted Mr. Edwards as he was: "Her husband had always been to her a coldly thoughtful man who made few and dutiful physical demands on her. If he had never been warm, he had never been cruel either. Her dramas and emotions had to do with the boys, with the vestry, and with food." She appeared to be content with her life, but like several of Steinbeck's middle-class women, she had no real talent or knowledge which would add to her family's well being, no drive and determination and human nobility. Even when her husband needed her for comfort and sympathy, if "neither herb teas nor physics cured him, she was helpless."

She and her husband lived a happy life until he died at sixty-seven of strangulation on a chicken bone. "Before his death, he had groups of four girls in each of thirty-three small towns in New England. He was better than well fixed—he was rich; and the manner of his death was in itself symbolic of success and well-being." 22


22 Ibid., p. 80.
Through a character like Edwards, Steinbeck makes known his amusement and his scorn for a society which judges men by what they have rather than what they are. Always successful in appearance, social relations, and in material possessions, the Steinbeck villain is a personal failure. He has an unsatisfactory marital relationship and a complete disdain for those outside his class. He has no genuine passion or enjoyments save those of acquisitiveness and those pleasures which come from business transactions well handled and compliments exchanged with others exactly like him.

In one of his earliest novels, The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck presents some characters who share the damning faults and false codes of the middle class, while never quite attaining their level of wealth and outward success. This early work, considered by Maxwell Geismar to be Steinbeck's best novel, is an important one in understanding many of Steinbeck's attitudes, notably the ones concerning present-day society with its materialistic values. Though his sting is not quite as sharp as it comes to be in the later works, even at this period Steinbeck was a crusader for natural man.

The Pastures of Heaven, reminiscent of Winesburg, Ohio or Spoon River Anthology, contains ten separate stories of individual persons or individual families who live in the beautiful valley. Most of the people there are basically good, honest, hard-working and, for a time, happy. There is not a very high crime rate, nor is there much corruption nor conflict. Even the land itself is peaceful and productive. The fruits

of their gardens were the finest produced in central California.\textsuperscript{21}

In each story, however, despite the good intentions, the peaceful aspirations and the initial happiness of the inhabitants of the lovely Pastures, an individual is thwarted or frustrated cruelly. Why is this? What is the nature of the curse which the inhabitants feel is placed upon their valley? Our attention is drawn to the old Battle farm. One of the most productive farms in the valley at one time, it had lain fallow for a long time when the last Battle, John, in a religious frenzy made war upon a rattlesnake in his yard which he thought to be "the damned serpent."

Despite John's armor of "tiny cross-stitches in white thread" sewn in his hat and clothes, he lost the fight and his life. After a period of watching the weeds encompass the place, the neighbors saw a strange, non-talkative family quietly move in one day, and even more quietly more out. In fact, no one saw them leave, and when their house was inspected in due time, their breakfasts were still waiting on the table, uneaten. Thus the neighborhood came to believe that a curse was upon the house. When Bert Munroe moved in, he discounted the curse, saying that he had been living under a curse of his own all his life which he felt would cancel out the curse on the farm. "On the other hand," says T. B. Allen, the village storekeeper, "maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated. . . . Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crawling around the Pastures the first thing we know."

As each story unfolds, we see that the direct or indirect source of each person's frustration or loss comes from being in contact with a Munroe, each member of the Munroe family symbolizing the curse of modern

\textsuperscript{21}The Pastures of Heaven (New York: The Viking Press, 1932), p. 3.
civilization. The interplay with Munroe or a member of his family is very subtly drawn by Steinbeck; and even Bert himself does not realize what his position has been each time. The curse on the Munroes and its ramifications are so subtly woven throughout the novel that a surface reading of the book would not reveal the pattern of the curse at all. As Geismar points out, Bert and his family are not the real trouble source, but are merely "the poetic vessel of vengeance" of modern civilization. 25

Bert and his family represent the mediocrity and insensitivity of the stilted codes of the middle class at which Steinbeck sneers. Though Bert Munroe can never really make it big in the competitive outside world, he comes to the Pastures of Heaven, bringing with him the already patterned codes of the bourgeois businessman. 26 His failures have generally been linked to American progress: When he opened a garage and was making a good deal of money from it, the state highway came through on another street and left him without much business; when Bert had a successful grocery store, a big chain store ran him out of business. Bert brought with him to the Pastures of Heaven the curse of civilization, to unite with the curse first brought to the inviolate meadows by the Spanish discoverer of the valley, the first "savage bearer of civilization."

After Bert had bought the old Battle farm, he completely renovated it and "by stroke after stroke of genius, it had been made to

25 Geismar, p. 245.

look like a hundred thousand other country houses in the West."

Besides an uninteresting wife, Bert has a daughter, Mae, and two sons. Mae is the standard picture of a young, civilized lady. She kept a diary in which were recorded "a completely uninteresting record of dances, of parties, of recipes for candy and of mild preferences for certain boys." Like Mr. Pritchard, who had once in a wild, rash, youthful moment voted for Eugene V. Debs, Mae has already tried to show her open-mindedness by displaying a "long-legged French doll with clipped blonde hair and a cloth cigarette dangling from languid lips." Furthermore, "She liked to have friends who had pasts, for having such friends and listening to them destroyed in her any regret that her own life had been blameless." Mae's world of make-believe is much akin to the Pritchards.

Jimmie Munroe is an accurate picture of the moody, cynical, smart-alecky high-school boy. He knew that he couldn't trust his parents because "they belonged to a generation which had no knowledge of sin nor of heroism." They certainly would not understand Jimmie's "firm intention to give over his life to science after gutting it of emotional possibilities." Jimmie meant by science "radios, archeology, and airplanes."

A city kid, the young Munroe was considered quite a rake by the country girls who lived in the Pastures of Heaven. Actually Jimmie's "score of sinfulness had been equaled by many of his friends and easily passed by some." Upon discovering that he was unique in his new home, however, "he came to regard himself as a reformed rake, but one not re-formed beyond possible outbreak." Soon you could not have convinced him that he was actually just a run-of-the-mill, middle-class kid.

The Munroes' cruelty and insensitivity are shown in progressive stages in *The Pastures of Heaven*. Even with their son, Manny, they
sacrifice human decency for expediency and the practical. They continually commit thoughtless acts so that their own codes can be met. Instead of being compassionate and sensible toward their son Manny, who suffered from an adenoidal condition, they use the threat of an operation as a weapon to be levied whenever Manny has misbehaved. They mark his subsequent quietness as genius; and whenever he varies from this quiet pattern, they terrify him into good behavior, "but if he were terrified a little too much, a hysteria resulted that robbed him of his self-control and even of his sense of self-preservation. He had been known to beat his forehead on the floor until the blood ran into his eyes." If Mrs. Munroe had actually had the operation performed, Manny's adenoidal condition would probably have been cured before it arrested his brain development and left him hopelessly retarded for the rest of his life.

The Munroes were a popular family in the valley. At the end of six months, Bert was elected a member of the school board. They had become a solid part of the neighborhood; the other farmers liked and respected them, borrowed from them and lent to them, and everyone could tell that they were fine people.

Shark Wicks, lacking the talent and business acumen of Mr. Pritchard, had in abundance Pritchard's predilection toward money, position, and prestige. Probably the same motives which influenced Mr. Pritchard's suggestion to Ernest Horton that they could honestly make money by forcing a company to buy their patent in order to stay in business prompted Shark Wicks to cheat "ethically in horse trades" and to "force a few cents more out of his peaches than his neighbors
His neighbors all considered him a financial wizard. They asked his advice on their own financial matters, and he could be counted upon to help them out. Whenever anyone asked about Shark's finances, they would say, "Oh, I'd guess he is worth around twenty thousand, maybe more. He's nobody's fool." The truth was that Shark was worth very little. He perpetrated and helped spread the rumor that he was a shrewd investor, and he even kept a book with all his "investments" written down. It showed hundreds of thousands of dollars which he had made, when in fact he didn't have a cent saved or invested. His greatest pleasure in life came from an overweening pride in his imaginary ledgers.

When his daughter was born, he was as possessive of her as he was of his credit sheet, for she was a beautiful child, and precious things were to be coveted. "He did not love her as a father loves a child. Rather he hoarded her, and gloated over the possession of a fine, unique thing." Shark is finally forced to face reality and is brought to shame when he takes down his shotgun and goes out to hunt for Jimmie Munroe, who has dared to kiss his daughter. When Shark is brought in to the judge for attempted assault, he is asked to post an unusually heavy bond and must confess before the court that he is not a wealthy man at all, that he is virtually penniless. With his position in the community gone, Shark cannot face reality; and he and his family must move away to another town where he can regain the social prominence he has lost, and begin once more to live the lie so necessary for his own happiness and self-esteem.

Though not in the business world or the middle class, Helen Van Deventer in The Pastures of Heaven and the doctor in The Pearl are in the
Babbitt category only through attitude. Both of them realize the disaster caused by their selfishness, but they do not care enough to correct their faults. Mrs. Van Deventer understood her husband no more than Bernice Pritchard or Mrs. Edwards understood hers. She is just as possessive of her daughter as Shark Wicks is of his. She pampers herself and lives constantly with misery and loves it—again the neurotic trait of the wealthy. She mourned the death of her kitten, her father, and her husband in much the same manner in each case, "not ostentatiously, but with a subdued voice and a hushed manner. Seemingly she hungered for tragedy and had a life that lavishly heaped it upon her." She is selfish enough to deny her mentally disturbed daughter proper care in an institution by reasoning that it is the duty of the mother to bear the responsibility for such a child; it is just another burden placed upon her, another cross which she bears with eagerness. Through this attitude and the inadvertent interference of Bert Munroe, Helen Van Deventer destroys her daughter because she feels it part of her motherly duty, and then glories in the sympathy of her neighbors in the valley, who are filled with admiration at her will "to endure." 27

The doctor in The Pearl is another useless man impressed with his own outward success and unaware of the emptiness and ugliness inside him. With his education and position, the doctor has a good opportunity to learn of the natural pleasures and goodness in life through dealing with the simple unaffected natives of his small town. Instead, through artificiality and the false standards of his own social code, the doctor

lives a life externally successful but void of any spark of human decency or honor:

He had on his dressing gown of red watered silk that had come from Paris. . . . On his lap was a silver tray with a silver chocolate pot and a tiny cup of eggshell china, so delicate that it looked silly when he lifted it with the tips of thumb and forefinger and spread three fingers wide to get them out of the way. His eyes rested in puffy little hammocks of flesh, and his mouth drooped with discontent. He was growing very stout, and his voice was hoarse with the fat that was pressing on his throat. Beside him on a table was a small oriental gong and a bowl of cigarettes. The furnishings of the room were heavy and dark and gloomy. The pictures were religious, even the large tinted photograph of his dead wife, who, if masses willed and paid for out of her own estate could do it, was in heaven. The doctor had once for a short time been a part of the great world and his whole subsequent life was memory and longing for France. "That," he said, "was civilized living," by which he meant that on a small income, he had been able to keep a mistress and eat in restaurants.  

Here is a man who lives a soft life and considers himself religious and knowledgable and appreciative of good things. From external appearances, the doctor seems worthy of his great wealth, power, and prominence. Then we see the poor Indian man, Kino, who needs the doctor's services for his stricken son but who has no money to pay. In his dealings with this underling, it is obvious that the doctor is another who has surrendered a large part of his soul to the conventions of a society ruled by class and wealth and greed, just as have our other "villains" in other books. Knowing how to hold a teacup and having an education and living in Paris do not make a good man. In this encounter, the lowly Kino is certainly the better person, though the doctor and his friends do not consider his life or the life of his son worth saving.

---

The civilized mask of the doctor deceives us no more than the civilized rules and codes of the middle-class masses. Steinbeck's conclusion is that the oppressed and the poor and the "no-goods" are more likely to be "the Virtues and the Graces," than are those whom society considers the "Beauties."²⁹

²⁹Lisca, p. 23?.
Restrained by convention, the pseudo-secure members of the middle class lash out at the members of the lower classes who take life easy and who are free to do as they please. The latter group in Steinbeck novels has made an almost complete withdrawal from the fast-paced, materialistic outside world. Such persons are the back and the boys in Cannery Row, whom Steinbeck calls:

The Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried, mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them. . . . In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted 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 prostrate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the moose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums.

Cannery Row is a book of contrasts for the purpose of continuing Steinbeck's war on the middle class. Warren French notes that "The enemy Steinbeck attacks--the destructive force that preys on the world--is, as usual in his novels, respectability: the desire to attain an unnatural security for one's self by ruthlessly disregarding the feelings of others."

2 French, p. 120.
In Cannery Row, Steinbeck's attack is done obliquely, rather than directly as in The Wayward Bus or The Winter of Our Discontent. In addition to pointing out the virtues of the lower-class inhabitants of the area surrounding Monterey, Steinbeck intersperses his novel with amusing incidents which poke fun at false standards of respectability. His heroes, Mack and the boys, are unaffected and forthright about their pleasures. Unlike the Mr. Pritchards of the world, they are generous and natural, compassionate and fun-loving. The thing that would cause Pritchard to shake his head and abandon all hope for them, however, is that Mack and the boys have no desire whatsoever to become members of the outside materialistic world.

Mack and his friends live in a shack which they call the Palace Flophouse in Cannery Row. They are at their happiest when Eddie, one of their colleagues, fills in as bartender at La Ida, a local nightspot. It is Eddie's practice on such nights to keep a large jug underneath the bar counter into which he deposits the customers' unfinished drinks, or sometimes

If an argument or a song were going on at La Ida, or late at night when good fellowship had reached its logical conclusion, Eddie poured glasses half or two-thirds full into the funnel of the jug. Thus the boys could spend the next day drinking a mixture of rye, beer, bourbon, scotch, wine, rum, and gin; and if they were lucky perhaps the remains of a stinger or an anisette or a curacao which naturally gave a distinct character to the punch.3

The boys are always happy and find joy in everything they do. One of their highlights is a midnight frog hunt for the purpose of gathering frogs to present to their friend, Doc. It is just incidental, of course, that in doing "something nice for Doc," they have a roaring

3Cannery Row, p. 25.
good time themselves. Not caring for the conventional comforts of civilization, the boys consider themselves very fortunate on this particular trip, for they luckily hit a frying-sized chicken with their car. Although it takes them a long time to cook the chicken, for "It had taken him a long time to achieve his . . . masculinity," their trip and arrival are joyous:

Mack and the boys came down to this place happily. It was perfect. . . . It was a place to relax, a place to be happy. On the way out they had thriven. In addition to the big red chicken there was a sack of carrots which had fallen from a vegetable truck, half a dozen onions which had not. Mack had a bag of coffee in his pocket. In the truck there was a five-gallon can with the top cut off. The wining jug was nearly half full.4

Although lacking the niceties of "fresh eggs" and properly seasoned foods, the boys enjoy their dinner tremendously, eating it by a little sandy place near the river; then, content and nourished, they fall asleep under the pine trees. In the morning the boys pursue their frogs on property which turns out to be owned by a very rich man who is shackled by society in the form of his club-woman wife. Brilliantly adapting himself to the situation when the indignant owner comes to chase them off his land, Mack compliments the owner on his fine bird dog, thus pacifying all and earning himself a place at the owner's table for a few drinks. In the name of hospitality, Mack had generously broken the normally iron-fast rule that "when we're out doin' scientific stuff, we make it a kind of a rule not to touch nothin'." The Captain, as Mack and the boys graciously call him, has a wonderful time, and for once he has shed his stuffy exterior (while his wife was out of town, it is only fair to add).

---

4Tbid., p. 16.
It is interesting to note that some fifteen years after Steinbeck had written of the situation at the lake in which Mack so easily talked himself out of getting kicked off the owner's property, Steinbeck himself ran into a similar situation. The author tells us in his autobiographical *Travels with Charley* of his own run-in with the custodian of a lake on which Steinbeck was illegally camping overnight.

Steinbeck smoothly talks the angry, but lonely man out of doing his duty, and even shares coffee and whiskey with him. Better yet, the custodian suggests a nice shady place by which to park his truck. Mack and Steinbeck both use the same successful techniques in dealing with their fellow man. Throughout *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck expresses a taste for the simple, for the unadorned, for the natural. He prefers delicious food made by human hands rather than that which is "oven-fresh, spotless, and tasteless." His favorite people on the trip are the Canuck French migrant workers, who are poor but natural and fun-loving; and several times in the book, the author refers to himself as a "bum."

This ability to find contentment in bumming around occasionally, doing nothing or at least nothing more taxing than lying by a lake thinking, seems to be a major lack in the life of a Mr. Pritchard or a Banker Baker. These men have no time to pause and enjoy the pleasures of idleness. They have to rush about and be busy every moment of their lives, and would be terribly embarrassed to admit that they actually had some time on their hands—as when Mr. Pritchard comments to Camille Oakes, "Vacation, I wonder how it would feel to be able to take a real vacation?" Mack and the boys know, and Steinbeck knows, for their lives are more meditation
than movement, more pause than push. Mack could never become like the man on whose land he trespassing, for instance. He would not be able to find enough time left after his pauses to worry about all the things the rich and the successful have on their minds. He knows exactly what he wants out of life, what is important to him, and he does not have to hurry and scurry to get these things. Professor Bracher points out that Mack "has no puritanical objections to high living (and the genteel might find his thinking plain indeed); but most of the things valued by the middle class—mechanical gadgets, security, cleanliness, prestige, comfort—Mack finds too expensive." Mack and his friends would rather concentrate on relaxing on the beach or in their room at the Palace Flophouse, or they would prefer to shower their puppy, Darling, with affection; or best of all, they would rather look for ways of doing something nice for Doc.

Doc is proud that Mack and the boys have miraculously overcome the evils of greed and ambition and desire for money that so easily take possession of a man's mind and soul:

There are your true philosophers. . . . I think they survive in this world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else. . . . They could ruin their lives and get money. Mack has qualities of genius. They're all very clever if they want something. They just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting.

---

5Bracher, loc. cit., p. 193.
6Cannery Row, p. 88.
The boys are completely withdrawn from materialistic urges. When someone makes the shocking suggestion that they go to work in order to earn money to buy a present for Doc, Mack rejects the idea on the basis that getting jobs would spoil their good reputations. They prefer instead wild escapades such as the frog hunt. The fact that they are worried about their reputations shows that Mack and the boys did have some standards which they considered respectable, and the fact that they could in an emergency when all else failed go out and get jobs cleaning squid to make money reveals their characteristic adaptability. Whereas Mrs. Fitchard and the wife in "The Harness" were ruled totally by their standards, the Cannery Row gang is not so rigid in its behavior, though it does have a code to follow. Of course, Steinbeck is really getting in another jab at respectability to have Mack say that a job would spoil his good reputation. He has the same purpose in describing Mrs. Sam Malloy in Cannery Row.

Sam Malloy decides one day to take up residence in an old abandoned boiler. His family prospers there, and Mr. Malloy eventually rents out the large pipes as sleeping rooms. When her husband becomes a "landlord," Mrs. Malloy suddenly gets respectability. She insists upon having curtains despite the fact that the boiler has no windows. Although her husband finally gives in and says that he will not "tegrutch" for the money for the curtains, Mrs. Malloy says that "men just don't understand how a woman feels."

---

7French, p. 126.
The boys are completely withdrawn from materialistic urges. When someone makes the shocking suggestion that they go to work in order to earn money to buy a present for Doc, Mack rejects the idea on the basis that getting jobs would spoil their "good reputations." They prefer instead wild escapades such as the frog hunt. The fact that they are worried about their reputations shows that Mack and the boys did have some standards which they considered respectable, and the fact that they could in an emergency when all else failed go out and get jobs cleaning squid to make money reveals their characteristic adaptability. Whereas Mrs. Fritchard and the wife in "The Harness" were ruled totally by their standards, the Cannery Row gang is not so rigid in its behavior, though it does have a code to follow. Of course, Steinbeck is really getting in another jab at respectability to have Mack say that a job would spoil his good reputation. He has the same purpose in describing Mrs. Sam Malloy in Cannery Row.

Sam Malloy decides one day to take up residence in an old abandoned boiler. His family prospers there, and Mr. Malloy eventually rents out the large pipes as sleeping rooms. When her husband becomes a "landlord," Mrs. Malloy suddenly gets respectability. She insists upon having curtains despite the fact that the boiler has no windows. Although her husband finally gives in and says that he will not "begrudge" her the money for the curtains, Mrs. Malloy says that "men just don't understand how a woman feels."

---

7 French, p. 126.
This same light satire is exhibited in Tortilla Flat, another of Steinbeck's novels which is filled with men who have happily withdrawn from a highly aggressive society. Sweets Ramirez, like Mrs. Malloy, gets carried away with the idea of respectability. By virtue of an affair with Danny, Sweets becomes the only woman in the neighborhood to own a vacuum cleaner. Although there is no electricity on Tortilla Flat, she runs the cleaner through her house every morning, and evokes the envy of all her her neighbors, who are much more impressed with with Sweets' material respectability than they would have been with her moral respectability, had she possessed the latter:

Through possession of the vacuum cleaner, Sweets climbed to the peak of the social scale of Tortilla Flat. People who did not remember her name referred to her as "that one with the sweeping-machine." .
. . She excited envy in many houses. Her manners became dignified and gracious, and she held her chin high as befitted one who had a sweeping machine. In her conversation she included it. "Ramon passed this morning while I was pushing the sweeping machine." "Louise Meater cut her hand this morning, not three hours after I had been pushing the sweeping machine." 

Respectability (an unwelcome form of it, however) comes also to Danny, the hero of Tortilla Flat: "When Danny comes home from the army he learns that he is an heir and an owner of property . . . two small houses on Tortilla Flat." Danny is the kind of person to desire a house: before the war he had slept all of his nights in the woods, and liked it. It takes Danny a month in jail to learn about his property, to understand that the houses now belong to him. Someone had mentioned it to him earlier, but a night of heavy celebrating had caused a temporary relapse into his former state of savagery. When his head clears and he

realizes that he is now a property owner, the always generous Danny allows his friends to live in his house with him. Unrestrained by the civic and financial worries of the other citizens of the area, the paisanos sleep until noon every day and then sit out on the porch, basking in the sun and philosophizing on the problems of their neighbors. They live by minor thefts from their friendly and not-so-friendly neighbors.

While they steal occasionally, the paisanos often do their pilfering with a spirit worthy of a Robin Hood. When Teresina, the lady who could not keep from having babies, finds that the bean crop has failed, Danny and his merry paisanos come to her aid. Never stealing from anyone who could not afford the loss, the men pile up food in huge quantities in front of Teresina's house. Their zeal is evident in the police records at Monterey, which is in the midst of "a minor crime wave" at the time of Teresina's need. This desire to help is an admirable trait in the boys, even though it is usually a misdirected one.9

Misguided as this altruism is, it is still exceedingly kind, and Steinbeck, as well as most readers, cannot help sympathizing with one of Robin Hood's men or one of Danny's paisanos. Burton Rascoe describes the paisano as being "your better self; and if you wish and expect to fare well in a highly acquisitive society and if you wish to be well thought of by your worst possible neighbors, it is better to keep this better self hidden or in abeyance."10


Danny and his **paisano** friends find love and companionship and women whenever and wherever they want them; they laugh often, and they have a good time just taking life as it comes. They certainly enjoy life more than the frantic members of the stuffy middle class who continually sneer at Hack and the boys and who look haughtily down upon Danny and his friends.

Danny and his band of men may be scorned by the middle class, but they will never have the ulcers and neuroses which beset the high-pressured businessmen. They will never give in to the predatory social system which so many men follow. They will never feel any need for material possessions, nor will they desire excessive power. The **paisanos**' lack of concern for these things is seen in an incident in *Tortilla Flat* concerning a young soldier and his infant child. This corporal has let the boys know that he is raising his son to be a general. Danny and everyone present applaud this noble aspiration. The soldier then tells the story of how he happened to be carrying a baby with him. The child's mother had run off with a captain with "little epaulets and little sash." An excellent plan, the **paisanos** think: "This baby would grow up, and he would be a general; and in time he would find that captain, and he would kill him slowly. It was a good plan. The long waiting, and then the stroke." The father then explains that this is not what he had in mind at all. He outlines his plan to the **paisanos**:

"Well," said the corporal, "my wife was so pretty, and she was not any puta, either. She was a good woman, and that captain took her. He had little epaulets, and a little sash, and his sword was only of a silver color. Consider," said the corporal; and he spread out his hands, "if that captain, with the little epaulets and little sash could take my wife, imagine what a general with a big sash and a gold sword could..."
The paisanos cannot see the beauty in this plan and much prefer their own interpretation of why the baby should become a general. This is more than an amusing anecdote; it shows in action the greedy social system, which the paisanos have always avoided and which they do not understand. 12

This avoidance is exactly what these vagabonds want, for as Professor Bracher says, "Danny and his friends are the direct antithesis of the middle class: They do what they want to do, and they cheerfully pay the price for leisure and independence." 13

Without ambition they may go hungry occasionally, but their friend, the 'pirate, has access to the finer garbage cans of Monterey, and they can generally manage to cajole Torrelli, the village barkeeper into parting (always unwillingly) with a few gallons of wine.

The method by which they obtain wine and other essentials is an interesting one. The paisanos live by a complicated set of codes which Peter Lisca calls a "philosophic-moral system." It consists of a very humorous form of rationalization by which the paisanos talk themselves into doing things which at first glance appear to them to be wrong. It is used expertly by Pilon whenever any thirst is aroused in him. One such time occurs when Big Joe is sleeping on the beach and Pilon gets the idea of stealing the latter's pants in order to exchange them for whiskey. Pilon realizes right away that this is not the right thing to do to his friend, but then he starts thinking it over, and "then he

11 Tortilla Flat, p. 185.
12 Lisca, p. 90.
remembered how badly the pants fit Big Joe, how tight the waist was even with two flybuttons undone, how the cuffs missed the shoe tops by inches. 'Someone of decent size would be harpy in those pants.'" Thus Joe loses his pants and Pilon gains some wine.\textsuperscript{11}

Another example of the \textit{paisano} system of rationalization in action occurs when Danny requests two dollars' rent from his tenants so that he \textit{can} buy Mrs. Morales a box of candy. At first the \textit{paisanos} agree that they should give Danny the long overdue rent. But then they begin to think it over and agree that Danny should not give a gift of candy, that "candy is not good for people. . . . It makes their teeth ache." But, if Danny wants to cause Mrs. Morales to have a toothache, "that is his business." On further contemplation, however, the horrible thought occurs to them that Danny might eat some himself. Mrs. Morales' teeth are one thing, but those of their good friend are something else: "It would be a bad thing if Danny's friends, on whom he depends, should bring about the aching of his teeth," says Pablo. Jesus Maria then gallantly suggests that a "gallon of wine makes a nice present for a lady." The \textit{paisanos} agree that Danny should not be allowed to buy the wine himself, however, because you never can tell what Danny might do. So they buy the wine for Danny and then, too late, remember that Danny"is a man who knows little restraint in drinking." Realizing the enormous and frightening health risks involved in drinking, they bravely resolve to save Danny's constitution by disposing of the vile liquid themselves.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11}Lisca, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 87-88.
The *naisanos* system is amusing, and it is obvious that Steinbeck admires the boys for their cleverness which really does not harm anyone. At times, in fact, it even takes on an altruistic flavor. Upon closer examination, though, is it much different from Mr. Pritchard's talking himself into believing that he is doing a certain company a "service" by forcing this company into buying a product which will do damage to that firm if allowed to remain in Mr. Pritchard's hands? The "philosophic-moral system" has its virtues, but it is really no more ethical than the one employed by Mr. Pritchard or any of the millions of men like him. Not facing up to reality is one reason these primitives fail; another factor is their irresponsibility; and the most important reason of all, in Danny's case, is the inability to "split" before society.

Danny is engaged in a tremendous struggle during the entire book. Pilon warns Danny of the evils of property:

Now it is over. . . . Now the great times are done. Thy friends will mourn, but nothing will come of their mourning. . . . When one is poor, one thinks, "If I had money I would share it with my good friends." But let that money come and charity flies away. So it is with thee, my once-friend. Thou art lifted above thy friends. Thou art a man of property. Thou wilt forget thy friends who shared everything with thee, even their brandy.16

The fact is that Danny cannot forget his friends and the way things were before he became a property owner. When Pilon and his cohorts burn down Danny's second house, he tries to act as a man in his high status should act. When his friends shamefacedly report the news that his house is gone, Danny calls them "dogs of dogs," "thieves of decent folk's other houses."

and several other appropriate derogatory names. This social concession out of the way, however, Danny happily welcomes his friends back into his fold.17

Danny cannot be a member of the property owners; he feels that he belongs in the woods, living a free life without any restrictions or responsibilities. Under the yoke of ownership, Danny's spirit is crushed. Toward the end of the novel, Danny grows restless and horribly depressed, probably for the first time in his happy life:

Danny began to dream of the days of his freedom. He had slept in the woods in summer, and in the warm hay of barns when the winter cold was in. The weight of property was not upon him then. . . . When Danny thought of the old lost time, he could taste again how good the stolen food was, and he longed for that old time again. Since his inheritance had lifted him, he had not fought often. He had been drunk, but not adventurously so: Always the weight of the house was upon him; always the responsibility to his friends.

Danny began to mope on the front porch, so that his friends thought him ill. . . . For a month he brooded. . . . In the end he gave up to his longing. One night he ran away. He went into the pine woods and disappeared.18

Danny then embarks upon one of the longest orgies in the history of Tortilla Flat. He drinks prodigiously; he steals; and he loves with amazing frequency. Pilen remarks, "Danny is sinning in a way which, sin for sin, beats any record I ever heard of."

His frenzy reaches such a fever pitch, however, that Danny runs out of desires, and it is only one big final party that can raise him slightly from his lethargy. In the end, Danny is killed by some unknown adversary who answers his fearful challenge ("Who will fight? . . .

------------------------

17 Lisca, p. 83.
18 Tortilla Flat, pp. 261-262.
Is there no one left in the world who is not afraid?""). When no one appears to answer his challenge, Danny rushes to the door with the other guests fast behind him. As he goes out into the darkness, his friends stand still and listen:

Outside the house they heard his roaring challenge. They heard the table-leg whistle like a meteor through the air. They heard his footsteps charging down the yard. And then, behind the house, in the gulch, they heard an answering challenge so fearful and so chill that their spines wilted like nasturtium stems under frost. Even now, when the people speak of Danny's opponent, they lower their voices and look furtively about. They heard his last shrill cry of defiance, and then a thump. And then silence.19

Steinbeck does not say who "The Enemy" is. Maxwell Geismar calls him "the specter of civilization,"20 and this observation would seem to be an apt one. In his symbolic fight against civilization, Danny loses, and this is significant in understanding Steinbeck's attitude toward society. Man cannot win against civilization by trying to be completely free and individualistic; he cannot adapt to it unless he makes some kind of concession. Reversion to a primitive state will not bring happiness to a man, because he cannot separate himself from the rest of the world. Danny is afraid of society, and society is afraid of Danny, and in reply to Danny's challenge, "Who will fight? Who is not afraid?" the answer can only be those who compromise, those who give in to modern civilization on the one hand, while retaining their values and individuality on the other.

Man cannot achieve this blissful state by ignoring his obli-

19 Ibid., p. 301.

20 Geismar, p. 255.
gations and responsibilities, though this may seem the easiest course at the time. Although Steinbeck presents Mack as a gay, uncomplicated lowlife, his moments of unhappiness can be traced to concessions he made in order to gain his freedom. One has only to hear Mack's speech to Doc after the party which the boys had thrown had resulted in the wrecking of Doc's house while its owner was away:

It don't do no good to say I'm sorry. I been sorry all my life. This ain't no new thing. It's always like this. I had a wife. Same thing. Ever'thing I done turned sour. She couldn't stand it any more. If I give her a present they was something wrong with it. She only got hurt from me. She couldn't stand it no more. Same thing every place 'til I just got to clowning. I don't do nothin' but clown no more. Try to make the boys laugh.21

Mack's wife, apparently another devotee of success and material gain, could not adjust or compromise with Mack's irresponsible ways; so she left him. Even Steinbeck's primitives cannot escape reality in their dealings with those who do not share their code; life is not always so gay.

There can be no doubt in a book such as Cannery Row or Tortilla Flat as to which characters Steinbeck prefers. He loves and admires Mack and the boys, and he has an amused compassion for the paisanos. His preference for the latter over the Babbitry who read Tortilla Flat and who termed it and its people "quaint" and "underdoggish" is noted in the preface to the Modern Library edition of the book:

I wrote these stories because they were true stories and because I liked them. But literary slummers have taken these people up with the vulgarity of duchesses who are amused and sorry for a peasantry. These stories are out, and I cannot recall them. But I shall never again subject to the vulgar touch of the decent good people

21Cannery Row, p. 82.
of laughter and kindness, of honest lusts and direct eyes, of courtesy beyond politeness. If I have done them harm by telling a few of their stories, I am sorry. It will not happen again.

Steinbeck's preference for these people seems to be an honest one and a highly personal one. To favor them is his prerogative, but whether or not they can stand up under close inspection is debatable. In comparison with the middle-class characters he created, the paisanos and the other natural heroes are warm and human and much more likable. When they are examined on their own merit, however, they do not come off so well. Their troubles and the poverty which forces them to steal does not come from middle-class restrictions and interference, but from their own irresponsibility, and their own laziness. Frederick Carpenter sums up the shortcomings of Steinbeck's beloved paisanos:

"These paisanos are children of nature. Civilization punishes them because they ignore its laws. But their natural community fails finally through its own lack of purpose. To the values of nature must also be added the values of civilization." 22

An especially humorous example of a character ignoring the values of civilization but enjoying to the fullest the values of nature is the case of the Lopez sisters in The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck's fore-runners of the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. These jolly ladies own a small business of which a pine board advertisement proclaims: "TORTILLAS, ENCHILADAS, TAMALES AND SOME OTHER SPANISH COOKING, R. & M. LOPEZ." When their father died and left them "forty acres of rocky hillside and no money at all," the girls were forced to open up some kind of business in order

22 Carpenter, loc. cit., p. 456.
to support themselves. As they are both good cooks, the girls decide upon a restaurant. They have no illusions about becoming wealthy, but they soon find out that business is too slow to allow them even a bare existence. It is only natural, therefore, for the girls to be tremendously appreciative whenever any customer buys several tortillas or spends a little extra money in the shop.

So one day when a customer buys several enchiladas, Rosa, overcome with gratitude, gives herself to the customer. When telling her sister of this, she hastens to add, "Do not make a mistake... I did not take money. The man had eaten three enchiladas--three?"

After that first act of gratefulness, the sisters realize that it would be very helpful to their business if they would "encourage" the customers in that manner. And in case the Virgin might frown upon this rather extreme form of encouragement, the sisters "remained persistently religious." When either of them had encouraged a customer,

She went directly to the little procelain Virgin, now conveniently placed in the hall to be accessible from both bedrooms, and prayed for forgiveness. Sins were not allowed to pile up. They confessed each one as it was committed. Under the Virgin there was a polished place on the floor where they had knelt in their night-dresses.23

The business of the Lopez sisters runs smoothly and happily and successfully because of their grateful "encouragements" for each good customer. And encouragement was only bestowed upon those who deserved reward and thanks for alleviating their hunger at the Lopez establishment:

It must not be supposed that the sisters were prodigal of their encouragement. They accepted no money for anything except their cooking. However, if a man ate three or more of their dishes, the soft hearts of the sisters

23 The Pastures of Heaven, p. 119.
broke with gratitude, and that man became a candidate for encouragement.\footnote{Ibid., p. 120.}

If ever money was offered as payment for their encouragement, the sisters considered it a terrible insult and never again would they offer encouragement to such a man. Money represented shame:

On an unfortunate night, a man whose appetite was not equal to three enchiladas offered to Rosa the money of shame. There were several other customers in the house at the time. The offer was cast into a crackle of conversation. Instantly the noise ceased, leaving a horrified silence. Maria hid her face in her hands. Rosa grew pale and then flushed brilliant with furious blood. She panted with emotion and her eyes sparkled. Her fat, strong hands rose like eagles and settled on her hips. But when she spoke with a curious emotional restraint. "It is an insult to me," she said huskily. "You do not know, perhaps, that General Vallejo is nearly our ancestor, so close as that we are related. Do you think his hand could stay from his sword to hear you insult two ladies so nearly in his family. You say to us, "You are shameful women!" We, who make the finest, the thinnest tortillas in all California." She panted with the effort to restrain herself.\footnote{Ibid., p. 120-121.}

The sisters conduct their business in this manner for a while, and although they don't earn a great amount, they make enough to exist. But one day Burt Monroe thinks, "It'd be a good joke to tell old lady Huenecker we saw her old man run'n'g off with Maria Lopez." Bert does this, and Mrs. Huenecker demands that the sheriff do something about those bad women. She makes such a fuss that the sheriff has no choice but to close the restaurant. "I have a complaint that you are running a bad house," he says to Rosa. Rosa replies that it is "a lie and an insult to our mother and to General Vallejo." The sheriff closes the
business down, and Rosa ponders their fate:

"You know it is true that we will starve if we cannot sell enchiladas. Do not blame me too much when I tell you this. I have made up my mind. See, Maria! I will go to San Francisco and be a bad woman." Her head drooped low over her fat hands. Maria's sobbing had stopped. She crept close to her sister.

"For money?" she whispered in horror.

"Yes," cried Rosa bitterly. "For money. For a great deal of money. And may the good Mother forgive me." 26

Maria, always loyal to her sister, agrees to go along with her. Thus, both of them are no longer able to deceive themselves about what they have become—they are now reduced to prostitutes in mind and spirit as well as in truth. It is again Bert Munroe who inadvertently is the cause of changing someone's life. Had it not been for his practical joke, the Lopez sisters could have gone on deceiving themselves about their profession, thinking themselves grateful businesswomen. Instead, both of them are reduced to whoredom in a big city house; harsh reality has blotted out their little world of make believe.

Steinbeck and his readers find themselves feeling very sympathetic toward the Lopez sisters. There is nothing clearly sordid or ugly about their tale; they are likable and amusing and the whole situation seems rather light. It seems that Steinbeck is saying that prostitution is all right, as long as it isn't called that, and as long as the prostitutes don't act sinful and hard as a prostitute is expected to act. This is certainly a novel theory, but one that must regretfully be cast aside, despite the fact that Rosa and Maria Lopez are, for a while, congenial company for the reader. Steinbeck knows

-------------------------

26 Ibid., pp. 128-129.
that he cannot use prostitution as a means of forwarding his thesis that civilization is corrupt with materialistic people, and that those natural-acting people are so much better than the middle class. The Lopez sisters are not better than most other people, and not as good as some. They are more interesting and more amusing, and their appeal lies therein rather than with a study of their morality. We know that women who sin so easily could not retain their innocence through simple rationalization, just as Pilon and the others never really convince themselves that their rationalized conclusions are accurate ones. All of this pretense—with the paisanos, with Mr. Pritchard and Banker Baker, and with the Lopez sisters—is designed to pacify society and to keep appearances up. If the sisters were really sincere, they could go to San Francisco and get a job in a restaurant rather than in a whore house, in order to avoid this "shame" which would come to them. Their downfall is not caused by Bert Munroe bearing the "curse of modern civilization" but rather through their own laziness and self-deceit.27

A more clear-cut illustration of the curse appears in the last episode concerning one of the inhabitants of the Pastures of Heaven. Richard Whiteside came to the lovely valley in 1850 and built the most beautiful and most substantial-looking house in the area. His avowed purpose was to found a dynasty. Richard and Alicia had one child, John, who was of the same temperament as his father and who shared his father's beliefs of perpetuation. When the boy was ten years old, Richard read to him from such historians as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

27Carpenter, loc. cit., p. 457.
When John's son William becomes old enough to be read to from the great books, he pays no attention. William's mind is of a completely different bent: he is interested in business and in accumulating possessions. "He was not only very secretive, but sharp in a business sense! He sells his possessions to the other boys, and when they are tired of them, buys them back at a lower price.

Little gifts of money multiplied in his hands in mysterious ways. It was a long time before John would admit to himself that he could not communicate with his son. When he gave Bill a heifer, and Bill immediately traded it for a litter of pigs which he raised and sold, John laughed at himself.28

When John grows up and confronts his parents with the fact that he is planning to be married, his father hears of the son's plans to leave the old home:

Nae was raised in town. . . . All of her friends live in Monterey, you know--friends she went to high school with. She doesn't like it out here where there's nothing doing. . . . So when she said she wanted to live in town I bought a partnership in the Ford agency. I always wanted to get into business.29

This emphasis on the materialistic--city-living instead of country-living, business deals rather than the uncomplicated life of the farm--does not seem to be a good thing to old John Whiteside:

John Whiteside lived in a straight line. He was ambitionless; his farm not only made him a good living, but paid enough so he could hire men to work it for him. He wanted nothing beyond what he had or could easily procure. He was one of the few men who could savor a moment while he held it. And he knew that it was

28The Pastures of Heaven, p. 226.
29Ibid., p. 229.
a good life he was leading, a uniquely good life. 30

At first, John is very disappointed to hear William talk of moving away, but then he talks himself into believing that this is just a temporary thing, and that William will come back to the family seat in a short time, after he has seen the pressures of the business world.

After his son's marriage and departure, John devotes all of his energy toward his house with the hopes of making it more attractive to William and his new wife:

He painted the house although it did not need it very badly. He mercilessly trimmed the shrubs in the garden.

"The land isn't producing enough," he told Bert Nimroe. "I've let it go for a long time. I could be raising a lot more on it than I am."

"Yes," said Bert. "None of us make our land produce enough. I've always wondered why you didn't have a band of sheep. Seems to me your hills would carry quite a flock."

"We used to have a flock in my father's time. That seems a long time ago. But, as I tell you, I've let the place go. The brush has got thick."

"Burn it off," said Bert. "If you burn that brush this fall you'll get fine pasture next spring."

The above scene between John and Bert is a large step toward the destruction of John's dreams. The "curse" is beginning to work, for John has now been hit with the spark of materialism; Bert has planted the suggestion of how he could start raising more and making more money.

The day on which the men plan to burn the brush is a clear one preceded by a rain the night before. Everything goes fine until a little whirlwind comes up and throws a spark into the basement of John's house.

30 Ibid., p. 22h.
This develops into a raging fire which destroys John's house and any hopes of the dynasty which his father had planned. Steinbeck's Munroe "curse" has helped destroy another unsuspecting victim. Once a contented, unambitious, non-acquisitive type of person, John through the desertion of his son and through the thoughtless blundering of Pert Munroe has turned in the direction of materialism and thereby lost his status as a natural man. For this reason he is finally and thoroughly defeated.

Finally we have Junius Maltby. A discontented accountant in a large city, Junius is forced to come to the Pastures of Heaven at the age of thirty-five because of reasons of health. He looks upon this excuse as an escape from the dull world of which he was an unhappy member:

The accident to his health filled Junius with pleasure, for it cut the strings he had been unable to sever for himself. He had five hundred dollars, not that he ever saved any money; he had simply forgotten to spend it. "With that much," he said, "I'll either recover and make a clean, new start, or else I'll die and be through with the whole business."

Junius quickly regains his health after moving into the valley, but never regains his ambition. "Throughout the day he had always some small stick protruding from his mouth, a habit only the laziest and most ruminative of men acquire. This convalescence took place in 1910."

By 1911 Maltby has married the woman with whom he has been rooming and has begun his complete withdrawal from the world outside of his books and the pleasant stream: "He spent hours at a time dangling his feet in the meadow stream and reading his pocket copy of Kidnapped."

Because of Maltby's laziness, his family grows very poor. But

---

\textsuperscript{31}Tbid., pp. 85-86.
this does not disturb Junius, because during this time of poverty, he discovers the essays of David Grayson.

Even the death of his wife in childbirth and the death of her two older sons does not bring Junius out of his reverie. Instead, he and the hired man "sit around the place together discussing things which interested and puzzled them--how color comes to flowers--whether there is a symbology in nature--where Atlantis lay--how the Incas interred their dead." Their conversations are like their laziness, involving as little effort as possible:

They didn't make conversation; rather they let a seedling of thought sprout by itself, and then watched with wonder while it sent out branching limbs. They were surprised at the strange fruit their conversation bore, for they didn't direct their thinking, nor trellis nor trim it the way so many people do.\(^22\)

Thus Robbie, the son Junius's wife left him with when she died, the hired man, and Junius pass their blissful days at the Pastures of Heaven discussing Herodotus, Stevenson, and other erudite topics. One day, however, cruel society enters the picture; Robbie must go to school. Mrs. Munroe thoughtlessly ends any hope Robbie had of adjusting to the school and the children in it when she presents the little boy with a new set of clothes. He is very hurt by this gesture because before her offer, he did not realize that he had been living in poverty.

Again Steinbeck is critical of society and its meddling ways, its emphasis on possessions and appearances. It is obvious throughout the novel that Steinbeck is against the society which infringes upon Junius Maltby's little world. The representatives of society wait patiently for an opportunity to interfere with the lives of Junius and

\(^{22}\)ibid., p. 93.
Robbie: "Wait until he's school age... We couldn't do anything now if we wanted to. He belongs to that father of his. But just as soon as the child is six, the county'll have something to say, let me tell you."

Society does get the boy, of course, and with the help of Mrs. Munroe it succeeds in ridding the community of such misfits as the Maltbys. Junius has to bow to the regulations of society after all. As he is boarding a train to take his son to San Francisco and the realities of life, Junius explains to schoolteacher Holly Morgan that the boy "doesn't know how nice it will be in San Francisco."

Peter Lisca points out that "the irony of Junius' words indicates Steinbeck's own attitude."

The attitude to which Lisca calls attention is that that favors the withdrawal of man from society. It is also that which condemns society for interfering with a fine contemplative person like Maltby.

At least one critic supports the legitimacy of Steinbeck's contention. Frederick Carpenter seems to believe as strongly as Steinbeck in the admirability of Maltby: "Only one citizen of The Pastures of Heaven seems wholly admirable, and even he is forced to leave the valley at last. But Junius Maltby, born there, will return again to become a leader of the people. For he is child both of nature and of civilization, whom ease will not make irresponsible, nor the world corrupt."

"Wholly admirable," indeed! Maltby has sat idly by while his wife and two children die, reading all the while. He has let the farm

---

33 Lisca, p. 68.
34 Carpenter, loc. cit., p. 458.
be overtaken by weeds. He is very fortunate to have a son at all, because he did not give the boy very much attention when the latter was an infant. Mr. Carpenter is misdirecting his enthusiasm in this case, and is grossly wrong in his assertions about Junius, especially when he says that the latter is a man "whom ease will not make irresponsible." Junius Maltby is one of the most irresponsible men in literature. He will not work; he will not participate in anything outside of philosophical discussion; and he will not even eat if the effort of procuring food is too demanding. Mr. Carpenter apparently did not read the chapter on Junius Maltby too thoroughly; otherwise he would know that Maltby was not born in the Pastures of Heaven as he states in his criticism, nor will such a man as this ever be "a leader of the people."

Steinbeck has failed if his purpose in writing the Junius Maltby episode was to build up the withdrawn, contemplative man and to satirize the strict members of a regimented society. In fact, he presents his hated middle-class characters wielding social controls in a much better light than he does his "natural" hero Maltby.
Mack, Danny, Junius Maltby, and others joyfully withdraw from the larger society outside of their own little communities, caring not about material possessions and status in the world. They do not even worry about feeding themselves; it makes no difference whether they have good clothes. No thought is given to their poverty. No attempts are made to better themselves. The less contact they have with society the happier they are.

Steinbeck has created another set of characters who worry very much about being properly clothed and fed. They also worry about their place in society. Characteristically they try to pull themselves up. In practically all instances, however, these people fail. Steinbeck feels compassionate toward these characters in conflict with society, and he evokes compassionate responses in his readers. He pictures the world outside of these individuals as being harsh and cruel—ruled by the aggressive, thoughtless, non-feeling middle class.

The Oakies in The Grapes of Wrath, Lennie and George in Of Mice and Men, Kino in The Pearl, and several others are all placed in direct opposition to organized society, and all of them are defeated. Defeated though they are, however, they sometimes gain a moral victory or receive an "education of the heart."¹

Kino in The Pearl is unlike the boys in Cannery Row and the paisanos in Tortilla Flat who avoid the world outside their own social

¹French, passim.
structure and environment, and he is also unlike the several characters in *The Wayward Bus* who succumb to the social restrictions of the outer world; for Kino neither avoids the materialistic, patterned existence of the civilized world nor attains it: he only strives to reach it, to change his place in the world. In so doing, he destroys his son and any happiness he formerly had, and he nearly destroys himself.

*The Pearl* is the story of Kino, a poor Indian boy who discovers a huge pearl. With this jewel, Kino hopes to buy peace and happiness for his wife, his infant son, and himself. He hopes to give the boy an education, and he hopes for enough money to be married in the church. He wants for himself a blue sailor suit and a yachting cap like those on the pleasure boats in the estuary, and he wants a Winchester carbine.

Designed to show one man's struggles against the world for a high place in it, *The Pearl* is an indictment against all those depraved elements of society that strike out against this man and thwart him in every step he takes. There is the greedy doctor who denies treatment to Kino's son because Kino has no money; there are the pearl buyers who try to cheat him out of his "pearl of the World," and there are "the dark ones" who creep through the night and try to kill Kino and steal his pearl. Injustice is heaped from all directions upon the poor young man.

Evil forces are certainly against Kino, but to Steinbeck's non-teleological mind, things are what they are, and it is dangerous to change them. At the beginning of the *story*, Kino is happy. Steinbeck pictures Kino's contentment early in the morning of the unknown but eventful day he is to find the pearl that will change his life:

The dawn came quickly now, a wash, a glow, a lightness, and then an explosion of fire as the sun arose out of
the Gulf. Kino looked down to cover his eyes from the glare. He could hear the pat of the corncakes in the house and the rich smell of them on the cooking plate. . . . It was a morning like other mornings and yet perfect among mornings.2

Kino does not know whether he is the only one of his people to hear songs within himself, but he does have his own personal inner music with him nearly all the time. On this particular morning, he listens to the "little splash of morning waves on the beach," and he hears the warm "Song of the Family." But this is the last time in the book that Kino is truly happy. After his baby is bitten by a scorpion and refused treatment by the village doctor, Kino despairingly seeks for the pearl to change his life. When he actually finds such a pearl, he is overcome, first with joy and then with ambition. He is obsessed with the beauty of the pearl and the events which he sees reflected in it. His whole mind and body become enslaved by it. Even when the shadowy figures attack Kino in the night and nearly succeed in stealing his pearl, Kino is still taken in by the beauty and promise of it. He will not listen to the admonitions of his wife: "The pearl is like sin! It will destroy us," Juana says, but Kino will not give up his dreams.

The theme of the story is spoken in part by Kino's brother, Juan Thomas. After Kino has stubbornly refused the unfair offers of the evil pearl buyers, he asks his older, wiser brother what else he could have done. Juan Thomas replies: "It is hard to know. . . . We do know that we are cheated from birth to the overcharge on our coffins. But we survive. You have defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you."3 Steinbeck, the

2The Pearl, p. 3.
3Ibid., p. 70.
romanticist, is pleading for the common man and hating the wrongs heaped upon him, but Steinbeck, the naturalistic writer and non-teleological thinker, realizes that things are the way they are and that it is best to learn how to cope with them as they are and to wait for change to come about of itself rather than to attack it head-on as Kino did.

Kino himself sums up the moral of the book, not realizing that he should apply his speech to himself. Speaking of a yearly sermon by the local priest, Kino explains the moral lesson to be learned from the mistakes of men before his time. Certain men in days past had tried to send a representative into the city each year to get better prices for their pearls, and each year the man they sent never returned. Kino and the others all see the obvious lesson in the priest's sermon that a man should not try to leave his post in life, that he should not try to rise to heights not suited for him. Kino interprets the sermon against the plan of the Indians to send their pearls into the city:

It was a good idea, but it was against religion, and the Father made that very clear. The loss of the pearl was a punishment visited on those who tried to leave their station. And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell.4

Steinbeck believes that the ones who guard the darkness of the walls are the most fortunate ones, though they do not always realize it. Recognition by the outside world is not a primary goal for us to seek—far better to be in physical darkness than in mental and spiritual darkness.

4Ibid., p. 60.
Samuel Hamilton realizes this in *East of Eden*, when he tells his friend Adam Trask that he much prefers his station in life to any position of power and greatness he might secure because "on the one side you have warmth and companionship and sweet understanding, and on the other—cold, lonely greatness." This same idea applies for richer, for poorer. Danny in *Tortilla Flat* was extremely happy before the curse of property came upon him. The rich tourists in the big shining cars in *The Grapes of Wrath* are not really happy and pleased with their lives, nor are the rich, trapped men of whom Steinbeck spoke in *Cannery Row*. And certainly Mr. Pritchard in *Wayward Bus* secretly realizes his discontent and his inadequacies. Kino, however, was content until he rejected his own advice and set out after things not meant for him. While Steinbeck disagrees with Kino's desire to exchange his simple way of life for one complicated by materialism, the author is compassionate and resents the forces in society which will not allow Kino to change his position. The very sermon quoted by Kino to show why a man should be content with the station into which he is born was originally delivered by the same priest who refuses to let Kino and Juana be married in the Church, because they have no money to pay for his services. This same priest comes to visit Kino and Juana after they have found their wonderful pearl to remind them that they owe their good fortune to God (and to think to himself of the repairs necessary to his church and to wonder what the pearl was worth).\(^5\)

There is certainly a sympathetic viewpoint for the young man and his family, and an emphasis on the unfair treatment and wrongs he suffered at the hands of most of the people around him. However, Kino's downfall

---

entails more than the curse of society. Within each individual, there are forces which compel one to do what he feels he must, whether it is wrong or impossible or even stupid; and no matter how much warning, no matter how many omens, the individual will listen to the voices inside himself, and will work within the framework of his own code or dream. With Kino, as with many of Steinbeck's characters, the shortcoming, the tragic flaw, is a fierce pride augmented by the inability to face reality.6

Kino is a man perfectly happy with his life as long as he is allowed to live it with his own people and his family. As long as he has no dealings with members of "respectable" society, he feels no inferiority and inadequacy. When the need to associate with members of the higher society arises, he is angry because they will not treat him as another human being, with compassion and understanding. He is angry because he is not allowed an entrance: the doctor refuses him because he has no money; the priest will not marry him in the church or baptize his son, because he has no money. He is a wronged, angry, impetuous young man, and he is at last fed up with the life of the underdog. Once he finds the pearl, his position changes. Now he will be able to take his place as a wealthy, successful, respected man. Neither the doctor nor the priest nor any other man will dare to treat him badly again; he need stand for no more injustice. His dreams are within his grasp, and cruel society is about to be conquered. Then, when the old injustice is not only heaped upon him again but multiplied, Kino is even more determined to withstand with his new-found strength. Kino is a man, and he will not give in to society, or to the tender entreaties of his wife, or to the

6French, p. 77.
wise admonitions of his older brother. Juana realizes what Kino, in his driving masculine immaturity, cannot: that his simple statement, "I am a man," meant that "he was half insane and half God. It meant that Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength against the sea. Juana, in her woman's soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it."  

When Kino loses his boat, his house, and finally his baby, he marches back into the town, walks with his wife to the water's edge, and in one magnificent gesture, throws the pearl back into the water. This gesture of renunciation of materialism concludes the naturalistic fable of The Pearl. The hero has learned a painful and a bitter lesson, but his dignity at least returns through the knowledge that his values had been false ones. By returning the pearl to the Gulf, Kino tells us that at last he knows what is important in life—love, family, simplicity, and contentment.

One other Steinbeck story shows almost identical ideas and points out just as vividly a young man's code in conflict with society. "Flight" is a short early work of Steinbeck's with another headstrong, immature, young hero, Pepe. Both Pepe and Kino are called upon to face mature problems with no real experience to aid them. Both are insulted and both react without thought of the consequences. Even the descriptions of each man's flight are very similar: It is through the same dry, dusty, rocky land that both try to escape, past scampering lizards and toads, and

7The Pearl, p. 77.
8Lisca, p. 227.
followed by the same black shadowy figures.

Professor French feels that "Flight" is the better example of Steinbeck's naturalism and is more consistent with his point of view. Steinbeck has let his readers down with The Pearl, says French, when he allows Kino to come back to the village triumphant in the Hollywood manner over his three pursuers. Pepe more realistically loses his hopeless struggle. Furthermore, by allowing Kino to go home again, Steinbeck re-futes the stand he took in Tortilla Flat which would not let Danny return to a state of primitive innocence after being exposed to the perils of property-owning. And Steinbeck errs again in having Kino slip all the way back into his old way of life without his former possessions, or any of his wished-for possessions, without his son, and worst of all, without any knowledge of how to cope with his life except by slipping back into the old way. French even doubts that Kino can come back.10

Whereas Kino is allowed at least to pick up the threads of his former life, Pepe has to sacrifice his life for his short, unhappy manhood. The problems of both men are brought about by society--Kino's by maltreatment on the part of the doctor, the priest, the pearl buyers, and the dark figures; Pepe's by the insults of a man he encounters in the outside world who is his social superior. The flaws in both men are pride and impetuosity. Mama Torres has indicated that her son is now a man and that "it will be a nice thing to have a man in the house again." When she allows Pepe his first trip to town alone, his pride in his manhood is.

9French, p. 142.
10Ibid., pp. 139-140.
overwhelming, and as a man, he "could not allow" the abuses in the form of name-calling which were placed upon him by a man in the town; his impulsive act, which was to him an act of manhood, was to flick his knife into the man's stomach, thus becoming a man and sealing his death all at the same time.\textsuperscript{11}

Again there is the malignant curse of society and, by the same token, the definite pattern of behavior within the character. This pattern is invariably important in the man's troubles, shortcomings, and downfall. To Kino and Pepe, society, as represented by persons who fit in with it respectably, is harsh, even bitterly cruel to young, untested men. But each man must contribute to his own misfortune. Pepe especially does this. He is lazy; he is accomplished only at knife-throwing; he is even more impetuous and immature than Kino, and he is just as fiercely aware of his manhood, disastrous though this awareness may be.

Both lack the proper perspective--Kino has dreamed of the material and lost sight of his station in life and forgotten that he had always before been happy; Pepe has tried to buy manhood with an act of violence. Their codes to them are irrevocable and even to the reader seem to be proper ones. It does not seem too much to ask to be married in the church or to want an education for one's child, nor does it seem unusual to strike out at an insulting enemy. Theoretically and idealistically, these codes are sound, but in the naturalistic practical world of Steinbeck, they are disastrous.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 99.
Tom Joad in the *Grapes of Wrath* is another passionate, defensive, prideful man who falls victim to the great monsters: society and the cruel nature of mankind. Tom, like Pepe and Kino is impulsive, fiery, and indignant. Like Pepe he had killed a man who liked to taunt others; and like Kino, he had struck down an enemy who was in the wrong. Steinbeck is again compassionate. Man's dignity must always be upheld—but not at the cost of breaking the rules of civilization, he intimates.

Though some of these rules are enforced by wild vigilante groups who call all hungry men "reds," and who allow these men none of the fundamental decencies to which they are entitled, Steinbeck realizes that things being what they are, all men must live by the rules set up for them. To flagrantly violate these rules can only result in defeat. Tom Joad's non-conformity may be his personal redeeming trait, though it will not win for him his goals of security and fairness in the world. But if society his imposed unfair restrictions and institutions, then non-conformity may be a personal virtue at least.12

In the beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck had suggested that the men's personal integrity depended on their will to resist: "The faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe... Their men were whole."

In addition to this integrity, man must also have faith in his own destiny to sustain himself in this constant struggle, and he must believe that society will eventually right its own wrongs.13


13Ibid., p. 320.
Ma Joad, consoling her son, has this necessary faith: "Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people— we go on." And Steinbeck himself says it: "When theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies . . . grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward . . . Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back."\(^1\) The author has faith in these Oakies not only because they stand up to oppression, but because they are uninhibited and natural and their actions are honest ones. Grampa is not too far removed from Steinbeck's free living paisanos:

He fought and argued, told dirty stories. He was as lecherous as always. Vicious and impatient, like a frantic child, and the whole structure overlaid with amusement. He drank too much when he could get it, ate too much when it was there, talked too much all the time.\(^15\)

But the Oakies go much further in their social development than the paisanos; they learn the value of a group. Casy, like Danny, went off into the wilderness, but Casy, unlike Danny, "found a wilderness ain't no good 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole." Danny was too much of an individualist to realize that only with joining and helping out could he begin to find himself and attain any kind of personal success. Casy realized the value of the group, and so did Tom Joad, who knows "a fella ain't no good alone." Despite all the hatred toward them, despite the name-calling and the cruelty, the Oakies were actually decent, generous people. They worked on the premise that "I have a little food" plus "I have none" equals "We have a

\(^{1}\) The Grapes of Wrath, p. 68.

\(^{15}\) Carpenter, "The Philosophical Joads," loc. cit., p. 320.
little food." From this working together and sharing together sprang up leaders like Tom and Casy, or Jody's grandfather in The Red Pony. The main Oakie virtue is selflessness, which can be seen in all their experiences everywhere they go—they help the Wilsons with car trouble; they share their food; everyone chips in to bury a dead baby; Casy sacrifices his own life for the love of his fellow-men; and Rosasharn, in a divine, Christ-like act of kindness, gives milk form her own breast to a dying man.

This compassion and love for their fellow-man is the redeeming trait of the Oakies, a breed of people who are admirable but by no means perfect in Steinbeck's eyes. They are impetuous, sometimes suspicious and ignorant, and their usual practice is to appropriate property without inquiring as to whether the property has actually been abandoned by the previous owner. Pa Joad believes that the manager of the Weedpatch is "a-snootin' an' a-smellin' aroun'." They respond to the horror of war with laughter: "They was a newsreel with them German soldiers kickin' up their feet—funny as hell." They are unreasonable and base opinions on optimism rather than study of fact. One of the main reasons that they are in their predicament is their unwarranted optimism over their crops.

Warren French points out that "Steinbeck does not argue that they are virtuous... but simply that they are human" and that society will not recognize that fact. They are human, indeed, and they know a

---

16 Ibid., pp. 319-320.
18 French, p. 89.
lesson of brotherhood that most of those with success never do. Even if this lesson won't put bread on the table in as large a quantity as they may wish and need, it has enriched their hearts, and may eventually lead them to victory over their oppressors.

While peaceful organization is important for the individual, violent collective measures are not the answer. Steinbeck's answer may be constructive working together over a long period to gnaw away at grievances en masse, rather than a single vehement act such as Pepe's knifing and Kino's impetuous determination. Joseph Warren Beach says, "This author is concerned with what has been called the forgotten man; it is clear that he holds the community responsible for the man without work, home, or food. He seems to intimate that what cannot be cured by individual effort must needs be met by collective measures."\(^{19}\)

The same elements of banding together in an effort to win even minimum rights can be seen in Steinbeck's prelude to *The Grapes of Wrath*, *In Dubious Battle*. He has taught them "the importance of social cement as far as small groups are concerned."\(^{20}\)

A casual reading of *In Dubious Battle* presents a picture very heavily shaded in favor of the Communist agitators, Jim and Mac. Mac is another of Steinbeck's "brave new natural men," as Maxwell Geismar expresses it.\(^{21}\) He is capable, thorough, and efficient—he is a doer. He has vast persuasive powers and possesses much courage. And he is


\(^{21}\)Geismar, p. 261.
bravely engaged in a struggle against the materialistic middle-class ranchers and landowners. Mac and Jim are fighting society and have withdrawn their own personalities in order to integrate the smaller society of the strikers. But in Mac this withdrawal of his own personality becomes his undoing. By devoting himself wholeheartedly to the group in order to promote the ideals of the cause, he has forgotten the more fundamental and more important ideals of the human beings for whom he is fighting; he has become so obsessed that he loses his humanity, something that the more admirable characters of Steinbeck do not do.22

Mac does not even seem really to like people at all. He calls the soldiers he knew in France "good, honest, stupid cattle." When the possibility of the strikers losing lives comes up, he merely replies, "Suppose they do kill some of our men?" ... For every man they kill ten new ones come over to us." He continually uses human beings as devices to incite the men to fight. For instance, when Joy, his old friend, is killed, he props the body up on a platform to spur on the men. He uses the same technique with the face of his best friend Jim, who is killed in the end of the book. Mac even stakes the life of a young migrant woman when he attempts to deliver her child. Luckily the infant and mother are both unharmed by Mac's untrained hands, for Mac had never even seen a birth, much less deliver a child. The move is successful because Mac gains the confidence of the workers, but his taking on the responsibilities without any experience is a defiance of the very beginning of life. The man is inhuman, and he is best summed up by Dakin's description of him as being a "cold-blooded bastard."23

22Lisca, pp. 121-122.
23French, p. 22.
Mac's protege, Jim, is even more inhuman. After undergoing his apprenticeship, he becomes the archetype communist. He says to Mac after the latter has cruelly beaten a young trouble-maker from the town: "It wasn't a scared kid, it was a danger to the cause. . . . Sympathy is as bad as fear. That was like a doctor's work. It was an operation, that's all." Jim has not always felt this way, though, and he has many good qualities. He has no vices and is devoted to his cause; he is a hard worker. Had he been able to find a job and had he been treated fairly by those around him, he would never have been forced into the communist movement. It is apparent that Steinbeck feels that society was the cause of Jim's failure, at least in part.

Their own lack of compassion and their inhumanity (much akin to what Mac and Jim suffered before they joined the movement) are eventually their own downfall. The communists teach them to organize and work together—the only way for a have-not to survive is through the group. Their organization fails, however, because they demonstrate the same brutality and coldness and lack of respect for the individual that had been to them the characteristics of society.

A character (somewhat like Pepe and Kino) who fails because of a burden too heavy for him to bear is the lumbering oaf, Lennie, in Of Mice and Men. E. B. Burgum says, "Though George and Lennie have their ambitions, they are scarcely in a position to attain them. They are caught between the dual pressures of their own limitations and those

---

24 Lisca, p. 122.

imposed by their station in society. George has been urged by his aunt and by his own conscience to watch after Lennie, who continually gets George into difficulty. Job after job is lost because Lennie inadvertently behaves badly. His undeveloped brain cannot cope with society and its perplexing problems. He never means harm, but he cannot help himself.

Again Steinbeck displays his brand of naturalism. The irony of Lennie's physical strength and mental weakness is the result of indifferent planning on the part of nature. Nature destroys the dreams of George by placing Lennie in his care. Both men are helpless in the grip of the vast chaotic forces about them. Lennie's errors are even predestined for him since nature builds him unable to cope with anything but the simplest of problems. Peter Lisca describes the murder of Lennie by George as "neither tragic nor brutal, but simply a pattern of events."

Steinbeck again criticizes the society which does not seem to let elements like Lennie and George in. Lennie is natural and human, yet he is unfit for a practical world. Owning "a house and a couple of acres" is the great dream of the two migrant workers, and this dream is later shared with Candy and the embittered Negro, Crooks.

The failure of the dream is inevitable, however, even when Steinbeck reveals that the financial circumstances of the owner of a

---

27 French, p. 74.
28 Lisca, p. 140.
29 Burgum, p. 282.
certain small place forces him to have to place his farm up for sale for only six hundred dollars. This brings the dream within their grasp, especially when Candy volunteers to toss in three hundred to go with the hundred which Lennie and George will have earned at the end of the month. The dream is destroyed, however, by Curley's wife, a symbol of the outside, materialistic world. She tries to attract the brute Lennie; and when she does, he is confused by her and, as he pets her soft hair, he inadvertently kills her, just as he did the mouse he caressed earlier in the story.30

We know that Steinbeck has great sympathy for these two men, but we also know that he realizes the hopelessness of their cause from the beginning. At the end of the novel, Lennie has to destroy the dream himself, for it is only through Lennie that the dream has any meaning. Were it not for his obligations to Lennie, George

could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay in a cat house all night. I could eat any place I want, hotel or anyplace, and order any damn thing I could think of. An' I could do all that every damn month. Get a gallon whiskey, or set in a pool room and play cards or shoot pool.31

These characters are not too far removed from the more admirable (from Steinbeck's point of view) Joad family; they band together under one responsible leader—in this case, George; and they have dignity in the form of their dreams. They lack, however, the means to realize this dream, and through the dream of a respectable house, they achieve only inner integrity, not outer success. Their dream is an


admirable one, but they lack the means to carry it out; thus, they must settle for a moral victory.\textsuperscript{32}

Lennie, George, Candy, and Crooks are all failures in the eyes of society, but George at least is not a complete loss. He has faced up to a social responsibility in taking care of Lennie and in the end by destroying him. George's dream could never be realized because of his humanitarian responsibility.

Essential to an understanding of Steinbeck is a study of the ending of \textit{Of Mice and Men} in which George deliberately kills Lennie and thereby the dream which has separated the pair from the other lonely ranch hands "that ain't got nothing to look ahead to." In Steinbeck's first novel, \textit{Cup of Gold}, the pirate Henry Morgan had stated that "Civilization will split up a character, and he who refuses to split goes under." George is the first of Steinbeck's early creations to "split" before civilization. Danny was unable to give in to the demands and responsibilities of being a property owner; Junius Maltby could not strike a compromise; Mack and the boys were always in trouble. Although it takes him until the end of the novel to do it, George finally makes his concession to society by destroying Lennie.

This is a grim lesson, admittedly, but it is one which is necessary in the non-teleological world of Steinbeck—the giving up of one's dreams as a prerequisite to admittance to the civilization of today. Warren French calls \textit{Of Mice and Men} a story "about the triumph of the indomitable will to survive. This is a story not of man's defeat at the hands of an implacable nature, but of man's painful conquest of

this nature and of his difficult, conscious rejections of his dreams of greatness and acceptance of his own mediocrity." In this he is superior to the middle class, whose worst fault is mediocrity and who are the last to admit that they are only average.

Society dictates that Lennie must be destroyed; so he is. Steinbeck realizes this inevitability, also. Burton Rascoe says that Steinbeck's intention in this novel is "to expound the complete non-morality of Nature in her physical aspects and of the morality of expediency that must necessarily arise from Nature's blundering." It is significant that George walks off with Slim, the well-adjusted ranchhand who is respected by the community. Slim is a person who has "split" before society, and he is a responsible member of it, without possessing any materialistic ambitions. By killing his friend, George has destroyed his dream, but has taken a bitter step toward compromising with society.

One of the chief faults which Steinbeck finds with society is its meddlesomeness. When the neighbors hear of the "scandalous" manner in which Robbie in The Pastures of Heaven is being brought up, they can't wait to interfere. The day he becomes six years old, they take it upon themselves to visit Junius to force him to send the boy to school. Society cannot allow the Lopez sisters to operate their "restaurant," either. Steinbeck's contention is that if people are left alone, they

---

33 French, p. 76.
34 Rascoe, loc. cit., p. 215.
can lead their own type of life, and they can develop in their own manner and to the best of their ability. Robbie was receiving an excellent education from his father; in fact, he was far ahead of the other children in his first-grade class. The Lopez sisters weren't really harming anybody. This contention has some validity to it, of course, but it is also true that society exists for the protection of all its members; and although laws may harm some persons, it is the universal good which is the important thing.

One person upon whom society inflicted harm is Tularecito in *The Pastures of Heaven*. Tularecito, like Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, is retarded, and he has great physical strength:

At six Tularecito could do the work of a grown man. The long fingers of his hands were more dexterous and stronger than most men's fingers. On the ranch, they could not long defy him. He had planting hands, tender fingers that never injured a young plant nor bruised the surfaces of a grafting limb. His merciless fingers could wring the head from a turkey gobbler without effort. Also Tularecito had an amusing gift. With his thumbnail he could carve remarkably correct animals from sandstone.

Thus at the age of six when most boys would have been in school, Tularecito is helping on the ranch, being a worthwhile member of the farming community and enjoying himself at the same time. Franklin Gomez, the man with whom Tularecito lives, realizes that the boy is too feeble-minded to gain any advantage from school. For this reason, he tries to keep the authorities from forcing the boy to attend. But the tenacious representatives of society would not miss an opportunity to make their power known: "For five years . . . the county truant officer

---

36 *The Pastures of Heaven*, p. 49.
and the school superintendent sporadically worked on the case." They were persistent, but "It was not until the boy was eleven, with the shoulders of a weight lifter and the hands and forearms of a strangler that the concerted forces of the law gathered him in and put him in the school."

Steinbeck's sarcasm toward the rules of society is evident. When Tularecito causes trouble at school, Gomez lashes out at the system which forces his beloved idiot-boy to go to a school which he cannot understand or benefit from:

This Little Frog should not be going to school. He can work; he can do marvelous things with his hands, but he cannot learn to do the simple little things of the school. He is not crazy; he is one of those whom God has not quite finished.

I told the superintendent these things, and he said the law required Tularecito to go to school until he is eighteen years old. That is seven years from now. For seven years my Little Frog will sit in the first grade because the law says he must. . . .

He can break a mad horse without riding it; he can train a dog without whipping it, but the law says he must sit in the first grade repeating "C-A-T, cat," for seven years.37

Just as Lennie is destroyed, so is Tularecito. The boy suffers at school because he cannot understand that the board must be erased of his beautiful drawings after the class has enjoyed them. In a rage one day, he makes a shambles of the classroom and runs everyone out of the building, just because the teacher has erased a set of animals he has put up on the board. When the class studies gnomes and fairies, he is extremely interested, and he even goes digging for their underground home. This proves to be his undoing, however, for his digging is done

37 Ibid., p. 53.
on private property. When the owner tries to force Tularecito to leave, the confused boy attacks the man. Tularecito is committed to an institution for this act, and Gomez is helpless in the face of the overwhelming odds in favor of society.

As we have seen in his attitude toward the people in *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck realizes a need for a society: Man cannot just ramble about without purpose or direction or contribution. In works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck has suggested the value of banding together. In all of his works he urges that there needs to be some sort of compromise with society before an individual can lead a truly successful life (not the type of success, however, that Mr. Pritchard wants). George in *Of Mice and Men* makes his compromise with society a little too late, perhaps, but there are several of Steinbeck's characters who are not too late.
That Steinbeck felt a great compassion for the Joads and the other indomitable Oakies, there can be no doubt. That he felt warmth toward the freedom-loving paisanos of Tortilla Flat and the "bums" who lived in the Cannery Row District cannot be denied. Steinbeck loved and enjoyed these characters, and to show them at their best he usually pitted them against their antithesis, the unloving and unlovable middle class. As a group, the middle class was despicable to him, but individually, he found them pitiable.

It is not entirely true, then, to say that his thoughts concerning either of these groups are so clearly black or white. Though he hates the middle class, Steinbeck cannot completely condemn its members or abandon all hope for them. There are times when he can see redeeming traits over their faults, times when he is happy to find a gleam of humanity in what had appeared to be a mere machine. For this reason, I cannot agree with the critic who felt that Steinbeck had "damned" Mr. Pritchard and some of his other middle-class characters. To damn is itself an attribute of middle-class man, and to accuse Steinbeck of this is to deny his own understanding and compassion and faith in man. Many are in purgatory, but none are yet lost. And those who are in purgatory are there because society entrapped them and swept them up, and they are more weak than evil, more to be pitied than despised. Mildred Pritchard, despite her cynicism regarding her parents, expresses Steinbeck's own hope and promise of what might be when she occasionally
is able to find their hidden graces:

She did not understand her father at all because he constantly confused her. Telling him something reasonable, logical, intelligent, she often found in him a dumb obtuseness, a complete lack of thinking ability that horrified her. And then he would say or do something so intelligent that she would leap to the other side. When she had him catalogued rather smugly as a caricature of a businessman, grasping, slavish, and cruel, he ruined her peace of conception by an act or a thought of kindliness and perception.¹

As Steinbeck's attitude toward the middle class cannot be that of complete hatred, his attitude toward their opposites cannot be that of complete love and agreement. He admires tremendously and probably enviously the naturalness of a Mack or a Junius Maltby, but he is realistic enough to see the faults of a life of complete abandonment of social restrictions, though he may not be able to see this quite as clearly as many of his critics have done. Occasionally he becomes carried away with his descriptions of the pleasures of the simple life to the exclusion of reason, just as Tennyson in his "Palace of Art" Spenser in the Faerie Queene were swept away in their own enthusiasm.

Steinbeck lives with modern society. He is not a rebel in Greenwich Village or a product of the slums or a "bum" on Cannery Row. He is a New York home owner, a husband, a man with responsibilities. Not even in his writings can he escape the knowledge that irresponsibility is bad; that there must be more to a man's life than freedom to break rules and codes and the ability to live naturally. There must be some compromise, a "split before civilization," as the author calls it. The characters who make this compromise are those having

----------
¹The Wayward Bus, pp. 66-67.
all of the natural, lovable actions of the low-lifes and who embody also some of the social commitments of the middle class without going overboard in the quest for position and prominence. These characters represent the author's settlement with society's demands as to what a hero should be, but though he makes many concessions, Steinbeck still does not quite convince the intelligent reader that these are the kind of people who should be admired and emulated. The truth is, though Steinbeck would have us believe that a union of the best characteristics of each group is possible, the natural actions of the "pearls" cancel out the decent code of society while adherence to the proper code would cancel out the natural actions. Steinbeck's plan is to create characters with the impulsiveness, the joy of living, the simplicity of a Danny or a Mack, but bestow upon them a position of responsibility and respectability, thereby channeling their naturalness into a worthwhile direction.

The characters whom Steinbeck has obviously selected to be the ones to excite the reader's admiration and who definitely excite the author's admiration are often just as unadmirable as the ones he condemns. Although they are supposed to be a mixture of the good qualities of the middle class and the good qualities of the lower class, the "pearls," are heavily weighted on the side of the lower class, for Steinbeck is still striking out against the extreme sterility of the middle-class materialists. The main concession Steinbeck is willing to make is that responsibility and respectability can be important if they are kept in the proper perspective.

The naturalness in Steinbeck's favorite characters is necessarily restrained, yet manifests itself in many ways. Frederick Bracher
describes "the pearls" as those who best adapt themselves to their environment—the ones who are the best biological specimens. Adaptability is a favorite Steinbeck theme; the good guys have it; the bad guys don't. When Steinbeck leaves Elliot Pritchard alone in the lunchroom to face the Chicoys, Mr. Pritchard becomes exceedingly ill at ease. He fidgets with his fingernail clippers and looks desperately around the room to see if there is a lodge insignia on anyone else's coat lapel. The only kind of personality to which Mr. Pritchard can adapt himself is one like his own, but in the lunchroom he is most disconcerted to find that "There are no other Mr. Pritchards here." Under the embarrassing questioning of Ernest Horton when the bus breaks down and the passengers are left to fend for themselves, Mr. Pritchard reveals his biological inadequacy: he had no practical ideas of how to supply the basic survival essentials of food and water. Pritchard can only conjure up a fantasy about taking over the leadership of the group and bringing them food and water, though he never asks himself where he would find these supplies, or if he could lead such a group. Of course, he couldn't, but the bus driver, a perfect example of Steinbeck's biological hero, Juan Chicoy could.

Steinbeck is showing us that the middle class has become inert in its comforts and confidence, that it is so secure that it no longer could fight a battle for survival if one were called for. These are the people who have lost their drive and their goals, except in the matters of materialistic gain and status symbols. The human animal's tendency to become complacent in the face of excessive security is explained in

\[2\text{Bracher, loc. cit., p. 192.}\]
Perhaps the pattern of struggle is so deeply imprinted in the genes of all life conceived in this benevolently hostile planet that the removal of obstacles automatically atrophies a survival drive. With warm water and abundant food, the animals may retire into a sterile, sluggish happiness. This has certainly seemed true of man.3

Steinbeck's men of action, however, have exceedingly high survival quotas and are excellent biological specimens. Slim in Of Mice and Men or Billy Buck of The Red Pony are rugged men who would never starve if there was food anywhere to be had. They are both highly competent ranch hands and have the respect of society, but neither has overemphasized material comforts or sacrificed his individualism which society tends to stifle. Juan Chicoy is a natural leader of men, and is drawn in sharp contrast to the soft Mr. Pritchard. Chicoy is the man who saves Mr. Pritchard from proving Ernest Horton right that they could not take care of themselves in a crisis. Chicoy takes over, and saves Mr. Pritchard the embarrassment of learning the truth about himself and his inadequacies. Doc Burton of In Dubious Battle, an idealist and an intellectual, can adapt himself well enough to find comfort and satisfaction in being doctor for illiterate migrants. Doc of Cannery Row, Steinbeck's most successful attempt at creating a truly admirable character from both the middle-class and the lower-class viewpoints, is just as happy drinking beer with Mac and the boys as he is listening to his beloved classical music or reading Sanskrit poetry.

These men, by refusing to become servants of materialism, can soar above the grasping middle class; yet, by having some responsibilities, they

3 Sea of Cortez, p. 227.
are far superior to the do-nothing evaders of society. Active, always the
doers and the leaders, these men are the most adaptable. They are good at
their jobs; they are strong of body; and they are always highly skilled with
their hands. At heart, as Steinbeck is at heart, these men are all bio-
logists. A description of the biologist-hero is found in Sea of Cortez:

What good men most biologists are, the tenors of the
scientific world—temperamental, moody, lecherous, loud-
laughing and healthy. . . . The true biologist deals
with life, with teeming, boisterous life, and learns
something from it, learns that the first rule of life
is living. . . . He must, so know the starfish and the
student biologist who sits at the feet of living things,
proliferate in all directions. Having certain tendencies,
he must move along their lines to the limit of their
potentialities.

This man is the direct antithesis of Mr. Fritchard—he responds to all
groups with whom he comes into contact, and his ideas and actions are
bound only by the laws of nature.5

The attributes which this kind of man possesses are indeed ad-
mirable when listed as above, but they do not always present a total pic-
ture of the man in question. In actual operation, some of these attributes
are not as practicable or as desirable as they seem in theory. Some of
Steinbeck's heroes proliferate too much; some of them have only the
mechanical skills of which Steinbeck is so admiring; some of them cannot
justifiably escape the same criticism which has been properly placed upon
the paisanos and Mack and the boys; and some of them possess many of the
evils of the middle class to which, ideally, they should be immune.

Juan Chicoy is a man whom Steinbeck obviously admires and whom
he hopes his readers will find admirable too. Peter Lisca has pointed

4Ibid., pp. 28-29.
5Bracher, loc. cit., p. 191.
out the symbolic meaning of the man's initials, J. C., representing Jesus Christ. Chicoy embodies all of Steinbeck's cardinal virtues: naturalness, the ability to "proliferate," a take-charge ability, excellence with his hands, tremendous appetites which he does not try to disguise or conceal. He is sensitive and compassionate; he is highly adaptable; and he has that ability to compromise with society—the courage to give up his dreams. He has no false values; he respects society's laws and occupies a place of responsibility in his small community. The total picture of the man is not, however, the one for which Steinbeck aimed. Juan is a mechanic. That Steinbeck greatly admired mechanics is seen in his description of Gay, the only married member of Mack's gang in Cannery Row. Gay joins in on the frog hunting expedition in which his first job is to see that Lee Chong’s old dilapidated jalopy is put into good running order. Steinbeck shows his great confidence in the master mechanic:

Probably any one of the boys from the Palace Flophouse could have made the truck run, for they were all competent practical mechanics, but Gay was an inspired mechanic. There is no term comparable to green thumb to apply to such a mechanic, but there should be. For there are men who can look, listen, tap, make an adjustment, and a machine works. Indeed there are men near whom a car runs better. And such a one was Gay. His fingers on a timer or a carburetor adjustment screw were gentle and wise and sure. He could fix the delicate electric motors in the laboratory.

He was such a wonder, Gay was—the little mechanic of God, the St. Francis of all things that turn and twist and explode, the St. Francis of coils and armatures and gears. And if at some time all the heaps of jalopies, cut-down Dusenbergs, Buicks, De Sotos and Plymouths, American Austins and Isotta-Fraschinis praise God in a great chorus—it will be largely due to Gay and his brotherhood.

6Lisca, p. 213.
7Cannery Row, pp. 38-40.
This seems to be pretty heady praise for a mechanic, even an excellent one. Despite his mechanical ability, Gay is still a bum who never supports his wife and finally leaves her and who spends the best part of his time behind bars. In contrast, Steinbeck sneers at Pritchard in *The Wayward Bus* because of his lack of mechanical knowledge. Ernest Horton questions Pritchard derisively:

"You know, we're supposed to be a mechanical people. Everybody drives a car and has an icebox and a radio. . . . But let a little dirt get in the carburetor and—well, a car has to stand there until a mechanic comes and takes out the screen. Can you set the timer on your car?"

Something is wrong here. In whose eyes is mechanical ability more important than other ability? Is God supposed to be so impressed with Gay's competence as a mechanic that he will overlook Gay's incompetence in almost every other area? If this is Steinbeck's reasoning, then we can also assume that we can overlook Mr. Pritchard's little dishonesties and inadequacies in favor of his roles as a good father, faithful provider, and hard worker. Gay is an actively unfaithful husband and embodies all of the undesirable traits of the fun-loving *Cannery Row* gang. He is so irresponsible that he cannot even carry out his duties as a member of that group, much less those of a husband. When the truck breaks down en route to the frog-hunting grounds, Gay sets out for a new carburetor so that he and the boys can resume the expedition. After he climbed down the hill and out of sight on his errand, his compatriots "didn't see him again for one hundred and eighty days." If we needed, then, someone to depend on, someone who

---

8 *The Wayward Bus*, p. 276.
would be a good friend to have around, someone loyal to his group, Pritchard again would be chosen over Steinbeck's "better man."

Gay's mechanical abilities and his natural actions, then, seem to be his only qualifications for the hero classification. It is doubtful that the readers can agree with Steinbeck's criterion. But Gay is a minor character, and we can't really say that he strikes a fair compromise with society, though he does have that one specialized talent which separates him from the no-talents in Cannery Row.

The other mechanic, Juan Chicoy, is a major character and one who does compromise to a much greater extent. Chicoy is the central character in The Wayward Bus. He has a respectable, modest business in Rebel Corners consisting of a "store-restaurant-garage and service station." It also serves as a bus station, and Juan drives the bus. Some years before, Juan had left Mexico and a life of leisure much like that in Tortilla Flat to come to California to make his living. The business he developed demands constant supervision, leaving him with no leisure time at all and certainly no time for loafing. Juan is a hard worker and is fairly successful. He has made his compromise with society and has submitted to its edicts that a man should work for his living, respectably meeting obligations and trusts. Although he has only a small business in a very small town, Juan is respected by his neighbors and his customers.

Unlike the businessman Pritchard, the middle-class "villain" in the novel who always fidgets and displays his nervous habits, Juan is always steady--never embarrassed or nervous: "He never fiddled with matches or with nails." He has every situation in hand, whether it be tire trouble, wife trouble, or employee trouble. In every case, he handles
it with the same ease, tact, and understanding. Chicoy is sincere and honest. He could never stoop to the tactics of Pritchard and the other middle-class businessmen. It is obvious that Steinbeck developed Juan Chiccy to be the complete antithesis of Elliott Pritchard in this book. Everywhere Juan is pictured as the forthright, natural, sincere hero while Mr. Pritchard is sterile and uncertain. Mr. Pritchard, saddled with a neurotic wife, could only get a vicarious sexual pleasure by going to stag parties, whereas Juan is honest and unashamed in his enjoyment of the opposite sex: "Juan looked frankly and with admiration at Mildred's legs, and his dark eyes were filled with so much pleasure, were so openly admiring, that Mildred blushed a little."

Juan, Steinbeck's compromise character, is contrasted not only with a typical member of the middle class, but also with a character who has attempted a complete withdrawal from society, his wife Alice Chicoy:

All relations and all situations to Alice were person-to-person things in which she and the other were huge and all others were removed from the world. There was no shading. When she talked to Juan, there were only the two of them. When she picked at Norma, the whole world disappeared, leaving only Norma and her in a gray universe of cloud.

But Juan, now, he could shut everything out and look at each thing in relation to the other. Things of various sizes and importance. He could see and judge and consider and enjoy. Juan could enjoy people. Alice could only love, like, dislike, and hate. She saw and felt no shading whatever. . . . Juan's eyes were distant and amused. This was a matter of horror to Alice. She knew that he was seeing her, not as an angry woman who darkened the world, but as one of thousands of angry women to be studied, inspected, and, yes, even enjoyed. This was the cold, lonely horror to her. Juan blotted out the universe to her and she sensed that she blotted out nothing to him. He could see not only around her but through her to something else.9

9Ibid., p. 35.
In both the comparison with Mr. Pritchard, Steinbeck's prototype of the soft, materialistic middle-class businessman, and in the contrast with Alice, who lives apart from all societies, Steinbeck shows Juan's superiority. He is also superior to Norma, Pimples, and Louie, some of the book's other characters. Throughout the novel, Juan is the man of action, the hero. He is almost as fine as Steinbeck can make him.

The outline of this novel is fairly simple. A group of people are thrown together on a bus trip, among them a rich corporation president, a stripper, a waitress, a young mechanic apprentice, a dying old man, a salesman, and Juan Chicoy, the bus driver. Their destination is the town of San Juan de la Cruz; and each member has a different reason as to why it is important to reach that little town.

Since the river is flooded, the bus has to take an alternate route, through fields and dirt roads, until it is finally stuck securely in the mud far from homes and other help. Juan has been wrestling with his conscience throughout the trip about whether he should desert his nagging, drinking wife and return to the old simple way of life in Mexico. Although he has made his satisfactory compromise with society a long time ago, there have been times when Juan, like everybody else, wants to shed his responsibility:

I get fed up a little sometimes. I drive that damn bus back and forth and back and forth. Sometime I'd like to take and just head for the hills. I read about a ferryboat captain in New York who just headed out to sea one day and they never heard from him again. Maybe he sunk and maybe he's tied up on an island someplace. I understand that man.10

---

10Orbid., p. 55. 
Taking the first step toward running away, Juan wrecks the bus and leaves the passengers to fend for themselves in the rain and mud while he walks away from them: "What difference did it make to him about the passengers? 'They can't starve. . . . It isn't any business of mine.' " He is exultant over his newly gained freedom: "Nobody ever thought he'd run off like this. That's what made it such a good joke. Nobody thought he could do it. Well, he'd show them." But as Juan makes his rainy trek away from the bus he had deliberately stranded, he does not feel as good about his decision:

Juan bowed his head into the rain and walked faster. It wasn't so good. He tried to remember the sunny sharpness of Mexico and the little girls in blue rebozos and the smell of cooking beans, and instead Alice came into his head. He thought of the big trees at the restaurant and how nice it was to lie in a tub full of hot water in the bathroom, the first real bathroom he had ever had outside of hotels. And there was always a bar of sweet-smelling soap.11

Once Steinbeck's hero decides to give up his dreams and returns to his responsibilities with the bus, he is immediately the doer; he takes charge of the removal of the bus from the mud, and he just as calmly saves Van Brunt's life. He is back to face reality, to assume his obligations, and to take up his life.12

By resisting the temptation to return to the homeland of which he dreams, and by returning to his responsibilities to the passengers and his wife, Juan achieves the "split" before society which is necessary to give him his heroic proportions. Steinbeck describes Juan to

11Ibid., pp. 163-164.

his publisher Pascal Covici as "all the god the fathers you ever saw driving a six cylinder, broken down battered bus through time and space."\(^{13}\)

Critic Antonia Seixas, wife of Steinbeck's friend Ed. Ricketts upon whom the character Doc is based, says of Juan's return to the bus, "We are not deserted; the Juans walk back and dig us out, and the battered old bus lumbers on."\(^{14}\) Frederick Bracher also smiles favorably upon Juan Chicoy:

Equipped with a revolver, a roll of bandage, a bottle of iodine, a vial of lavender smelling salts, and a pint of whiskey, Juan Chicoy feels fairly confident of handling most situations. He knows how to do what needs to be done, whether it be changing a ring gear in the differential, straightening out the kitchen of his lunchroom, pulling his bus out of the mud, and helping a strongly-sexed young woman to find satisfaction. He proliferates in all directions, and his strength and assurance are contagious. . . . \(^{15}\)

It cannot be denied that Chicoy is an improvement over both the staid middle-class materialists and the free-living spirits of Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat. Juan is for the most part a successful compromise, but in at least two respects he falls short of what might be expected of a "pearl." Chicoy is not always the man of action—the great doer—which Steinbeck pictures him to be. He is another adept at rationalizing, shifting the blame and decision from himself, and circumventing issues. Juan appeals to the Virgin to decide something for him in the matter of his running away:

\(^{13}\)Lisca, p. 244.


\(^{15}\)Bracher, loc. cit., p. 193.
You know that I have not been happy and also that out of a sense of duty that is not natural to me I have stayed in the traps that have been set for me. And now I am about to put a decision in your hands. I cannot take the responsibility for running away from my wife and my little business . . . and I am putting this in your hands. I am on the road not of my own volition. I have been forced here by the wills of these people who do not care anything for me or my safety, but only for their own plans. . . . So I am leaving it to you, and I will know your will. If the bus mires down so that ordinary work will let me get it out and proceed, I will get it out. If ordinary precaution will keep the bus safe and on the road, I will take that precaution. But if you, in your wisdom, wish to give me a sign by dropping the bus into the mud up to the axels, or sliding it off the road into a ditch where I couldn't do anything about it, I will know you approve of what I want to do. Then I will walk away and disappear. I will never go back to Alice. I will take off my old life like a suit of underwear. It is up to you.

Though the Virgin does not give Juan a clear sign, he still mires the bus into the mud and salves his conscience by pretending that the Virgin has given her approval. Thus the responsibility for his actions is shifted about to free Juan of the blame. Though this is a temporary lapse of courage on Juan's part, it is worth noting in the overall picture of Steinbeck's hero.

The second failure in the Chicoy legend is this: How can a responsible writer like John Steinbeck portray an adulterous relationship as a grand and magnificent gesture, an act of selflessness and beauty? And how can a responsible critic like Mr. Bracher be taken in by this pretense? As seems to be the case with most of Steinbeck's virile heroes, Juan's emotions are represented as universal love, a love of mankind. But are we to believe that Juan was motivated to make love

16 The Wayward Bus, pp. 221-222.
to Mildred in order to charitably help a confused young girl find herself? Juan has no pretenses about himself; he says "I like this thing very much," and this should show the reader that his motives are not altruistic, but selfish, and have nothing to do with universal love. Steinbeck himself cannot fit this immorality into the picture he wishes to draw of Juan; so in this case it is the author's own rationalization which turns a shabby affair into a "service." Juan is not "all the god the fathers you ever saw." He is only a mortal better than some in a few respects and worse than a few in other respects, but in this particular instance, only "a concupiscent bus driver who takes time out to have a brief affair with a passenger."\(^\text{17}\)

Billy Buck in *The Red Pony* is another character whom Steinbeck admires greatly. Billy is a ranch hand who takes pride in his knowledge and skill; he is solid without being stagnant, and governed without being stifled.

Besides proficiency at his trade, Billy Buck also possesses the ability to think non-teleologically, which makes him "capable of great tenderness, of an all-embracingness which is rare otherwise." Billy "proliferates" and reaches out to all those around him.\(^\text{18}\) One of the persons to whom Billy reaches out is the young Jody Tiflin, the son of the owner of the ranch. The relationship between Jody and Billy is almost father-son, and is one of the finest touches in the novel.\(^\text{19}\) There is none of the misunderstanding we find between the Pritchards and their

\(^{17}\)French, p. 118.


\(^{19}\)Beach, p. 84.
daughter Mildred, none of the selfishness in the relationship of Helen Van Deventer and her daughter, none of the hypocrisy and insincerity revealed in the Edwards' marriage in *East of Eden* and so often in most of Steinbeck's friendships and unions. This is an honest relationship, and both Billy and Jody appreciate and understand it. Steinbeck feels that natural men who are not hampered by wealth and position are more sympathetic than the materialistic rich, and their relationships are more sure and more wholesome.

Billy Buck is one of Steinbeck's most successful characters in that all classes could find something they recognize in the old ranch hand. The middle class would admire his drive and his desire to do every job well, they would understand his pride in his knowledge, and they would appreciate the fact that he kept himself always respected by following his own code of proper conduct. The lower class would approve of Billy's communion with nature and animals, his honest relationships with other people, and his lack of desire for earthly possessions beyond a room in a bunkhouse and enough to eat.

Another character greatly admired by Steinbeck—again a ranch hand—is Slim in *Of Mice and Men*. Like Billy Buck, Slim has made his compromise with society, possessing much freedom, but having a responsible and respectable position. He is good in his work; he is strong and natural. His powers are almost legendary: "He was a jerkline skinner, the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders. He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule." Slim is an excellent biological specimen, strong and active.
Like Billy Buck, he is considered an authority, so much an authority that "his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love."

And Slim accepts this deferential respect of the ranch hands "with aristocratic graciousness." He has the necessary ruggedness and was at that age at which he had achieved wise maturity without being old. ("He might have been thirty-five or fifty."). He was also sympathetic, for "His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought." Despite all of his accomplishments, Slim does not try to show his superiority to his fellow ranch hands, but wears "blue jeans and a short denim jacket" just like the other fellows.

When Carlson makes it clear that they have no other choice than to shoot Candy's old, ailing, smelly dog, Slim agrees that this is for the best, but decrees that the killing is to be done without pain to the dog and that the carcass must be buried.

Slim is the only person besides Lennie in Of Mice and Men who stands up to Curley, the boss's son who is a symbol of society crashing into the private world of the working man. Slim is pictured in sharp contrast to Curley, who holds the highest social position by virtue of his father's ownership of the ranch. His cockiness and lordly manner are traits encouraged by his social status on the ranch. Slim is the only one to bring the arrogant Curly to his knees by forcing him to apologize for an untrue accusation. Thus the man who has learned to cope with his environment is sometimes able to triumph over it.


21Burgum, p. 279.
Slim's greatest understanding comes at the end of the book when it is evident that Lennie must be destroyed. Slim knows that Curley would try to shoot Lennie for killing his wife and that if Lennie were caught, they would have to lock him up "an' strap him down and put him in a cage" and that it would be "no good." After George has shot Lennie much in the same manner that Carlson had killed the old dog, Slim comforts him: "Never you mind. . . . A guy got to sometimes." As Slim and George walk away from the others up the hill, the callous Curley asks, "Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?" He cannot see that George is crushed by the thing he had to do to Lennie, and that Slim, through his understanding and humanity, is suffering along with George.

Steinbeck does not limit the characters he thinks admirable to members of the lower working classes. Doc Burton in *In Dubious Battle* is an educated compromise who is happier tending to migrant workers for little or no fee than he could ever be collecting large fees from wealthy patients in the city. Like all of Steinbeck's favorite characters, he prefers the freedom which his way of life affords him. Having no regular office hours or hospital administrators to bully him or rich patients to order him about, Doc finds time to contemplate. During these moments of reflection, Doc is able to evaluate his life and his purposes and to review with satisfaction the care and attention he can give to a whole camp of migrant workers about whom 'ew others are concerned. Doc Burton does not understand entirely the forces that motivate the migrant workers, and this is another reason he travels among them; he needs to understand people who do not think as he thinks; he wants to observe them, to be fair and objective, and to form his own ideas.
about the workers: "Listen to me, Mac. My senses aren't above reproach, but they're all I have. I want to see the whole picture—as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of 'good' or 'bad' and limit my vision. . . . I want to be able to look at the whole thing."

Stanley Hyman points out that Doc does more than just observe; he has a desire to help, not because he believes in the justice of the cause, but because conditions exist which make his help necessary and important. Because things "are" is a good enough reason for Doc Burton to help. 22

Maybe if I went into a kennel and the dogs were hungry and sick and dirty and maybe if I could help those dogs, I would. Wouldn't be their fault they were that way. You couldn't say "Those dogs are that way because they haven't any ambition. They don't save their bones. Dogs always are that way." No, you'd try to clean them up and feed them. I guess that's the way it is with me. 23

Doc Burton's attitude toward his fellow man is always practical and helpful. Though he is sympathetic toward the strikers, he never wants to participate in the strikes. He is continually pointing out the lack of humanity in the communist's methods; he says to Jim, "But in my experience the end is never very different in its nature from the means. Damn it, Jim, you can only build a violent thing with violence." Doc is the only steady, capable character in In Dubious Battle who is able to see all sides of the problem. His life is devoted to unselfish concern for the welfare of others. The only trait he lacks is color, and this is added in Steinbeck's portrayal of another doctor for whom Doc Burton is the forerunner in attitude and ideals.

22 Hyman, p. 158.

23 In Dubious Battle, p. 194.
Steinbeck's greatest and most successful character is Doc, the marine biologist in Cannery Row and later in Sweet Thursday. The model for this Doc is Steinbeck's old friend, Ed Ricketts, and the entire book is patterned after events in this man's life. The setting is nearly identical to Ricketts' surroundings; the people in the book are those Ricketts and Steinbeck knew; and throughout it is the force and influence of Ed Ricketts. Steinbeck's friendship with this man affected the author deeply and permanently and, to express this admiration, Steinbeck wrote Cannery Row about Ed Ricketts and dedicated it to him.

"Doc-Ricketts" is an educated man, holding a degree in biology and continually reading and studying. He runs a respectable biological laboratory, and is admired by the responsible citizens of Monterey as well as by the "low-lifes" living near him in Cannery Row. He shares with Mack and the boys the love of natural pleasures. He eats at any hours hunger strikes, and in whatever quantity necessary to satisfy. He drinks beer happily with the boys, and they in turn admire his way with women. He prefers the "high-class" music of Byrd, Bach, and Palestrina, and is fond of Occidental and Oriental literature. He became the fountain of philosophy and science and art. His mind had no horizon—and his sympathy had no warp. He could talk to children, telling them very profound things so that they understood. He lived in a world of wonder, of excitement. He was concupiscent as a rabbit and gentle as hell. Everyone who knew him was indebted to him. And everyone who thought of him thought next, "I really must do something nice for Doc." Indeed, the entire plot of Cannery Row is concerned with a gigantic

---

24 Lisca, pp. 212-213.

25 Cannery Row, p. 23.
party and the various attempts of members of the Cannery Row community to "do something nice for Doc."

Like Juan Chicoy, Slim, and Billy Buck, Doc is a precisionist in his work. He has skillful hands, and he enjoys dissecting and mounting his specimens. Keeping orderly biological records and managing his affairs in a capable fashion, Doc still keeps his freedom intact. He leaves his room uncleaned, he drinks beer during working hours, and he maintains a relaxed manner with all of his customers and visitors.

Doc is a generous man; he is always falling into traps set for him by the clever members of Mack's gang. He always gives without regret, however, and even takes pleasure in listening to the pitches of the boys.

Enjoying his association with Mack and the boys, Doc has too much of their respect to be considered a member of their gang. The boys realize, for instance, that Doc would not enjoy the alcoholic concoctions which Eddie brings home from La Ida. His intelligence and love of the arts gain him the friendship of the upper classes. Doc fits practically any pattern of society, for he strikes a successful compromise with society as a whole. Peter Lisca explains Steinbeck's reasons for creating a character like Doc:

The apotheosis of Doc is inevitable, when it is considered that he embodies all the qualities which Steinbeck finds admirable. In him all opposites are reconciled. He is both scientist and mystic, both calculating and tender, both learned and common, both intellectual and emotional, both classicist and romanticist. He can kill twenty cats in an afternoon and stuff their veins and arteries with color mass for dissection, but he can also beat up a much bigger man for mistreating a dog. He can write learned papers in his field of marine biology, but he can also get drunk with Mack and the boys. He can be completely enthralled with the mathematical, polyphonic music he loves best, but if the mood is on
him he can listen to Pavanne for a Dead Princess and follow that with Daphnis and Chloe. As he puts it to himself, "I can play anything I want. I can play Claire de Lune or The Maiden with Flaxen Hair. I'm a free man." 26

Doc is also special to Steinbeck because of his great sensitivity. As Doc is working in the tide pools at La Jolla, he comes upon the submerged body of a dead girl. He is profoundly moved by the sight:

Music sounded in Doc's ears, a high thin piercingly sweet flute carrying a melody he could never remember, and against this, a pounding surf-like wood-wind section. The flute went up into regions beyond the hearing range and even there it carried its unbelievable melody. Goose pimples came out on Doc's arms. He shivered and his eyes were wet the way they get in the focus of great beauty. The girl's eyes had been gray and clear and the dark hair floated, drifted lightly over the face. The picture was set for all time. He sat there while the first little spout of water came over the reef bringing the returning tide. He sat there hearing the music while the sea crept in again over the bouldery flat. His hand tapped out the rhythm, and the terrifying flute played in his brain. The eyes were gray and the mouth smiled a little or seemed to catch its breath in ecstasy. 27

Doc is awakened from his reverie by a callous man who had lived in the region all of his life, but had never realized "that devilfish had been there." When Doc tells the man of the body, he immediately probes for its gruesome aspects: "Is it--bad? Rotten or eat up?" His only other comment is to inform Doc of the bounty to which the latter is entitled for finding a body.

Doc's admirable traits often come into conflict with society, but unlike some of the characters created by Steinbeck who fail, Doc always succeeds because he knows the value of yielding to society when

26 Lisca, p. 215.

27 Cannery Row, pp. 100-101.
the occasion demands. Honesty is one of Doc's virtues, but as Steinbeck and Doc both know, sometimes "people didn't like you for telling the truth." For this reason, Doc has to tell people that he wears a beard because he has a scar and can't shave, instead of the truth—he wears a beard simply because he likes the way it looks on him. He has to lie his way out of many situations to avoid making people uncomfortable.

Such a situation occurs when he makes a cross-country hike. When people he meets ask him why he is doing such a thing, at first he replies honestly because he loves true things: "He said he was nervous and besides he wanted to see the country, smell the ground, and look at grass and birds and trees, to savour the country, and there was no other way for him to do it save on foot." This answer is not satisfactory, however, for

People didn't like him for telling the truth. They scowled, or shook and tapped their heads, they laughed as though they knew it was a lie and they appreciated a liar. And some, afraid for their daughters or their pigs, told him to move on, to get going, just not to stop near their place if he knew what was good for him.

And so he stopped trying to tell the truth. He said he was doing it on a bet—that he stood to win a hundred dollars. Everyone liked him then and believed him. They asked him in to dinner and gave him a bed and they put lunches up for him and wished him luck and thought he was a hell of a fine fellow. Doc still loved true things but he knew it was not a general love and it could be a very dangerous mistress. 27

This sense of reality and understanding of society's universal positions carries into all his actions and relations. Doc, like all of Steinbeck's heroes beginning with George (in Of Mice and Men), who saves Lennie from the mob by destroying him, through Juan Chicoy in The Wayward Bus, who returns to pull his passengers out of the mud,

27 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
makes his compromise with society; he consents "to split" before civilization.\(^{28}\)

One of Doc's good friends is a retarded little boy who visits him in the lab. Doc is strongly attached to this boy, and the admiration is mutual. Frankie is like the rest of the people who live in and around Cannery Row in that he wants to do something nice for Doc. Unfortunately, the boy has no money, and he succumbs to the temptation to steal a beautiful clock for his adopted father, Doc. The police catch him and have to send him to a mental institution.

As with Lennie in Of Mice and Men and Tularecito in The Pastures of Heaven, the boy has to be governed by society; and Doc, despite his love for the retarded child, realizes that this bitter measure has to be taken. Still, this knowledge did not prevent a "stone which weighed heavily upon his heart." With an awareness of how society "is," however, Doc is better equipped to adapt to such situations. Warren French describes Doc's stature:

Doc is the man who survives, the heroic figure. Doc is not perfect; he is not infallible. He loses his head, and he is defeated--by death, by the imperfections of nature, and by the shortcomings of his friends. Doc is a man who has learned to find compensation for the frailties of human nature and other aspects of physical nature in what Yeats called "monuments of unaging intellect." He is one of those few "wisest," whom Pater celebrated, who spend their mortal interval" in art and song.\(^{29}\)

Doc is Steinbeck's greatest achievement in the author's attempt to create a character who is nearly perfect in his relationship with

\(^{28}\)Bracher, loc. cit., p. 196.

\(^{29}\)French, p. 135.
society. He adapts brilliantly to his environment; he realizes his own imperfections and the imperfections of others; he is honest; he is compassionate; he does not seek material possessions; he gives in to his impulses, yet he is responsible and plays an important part in society. Understanding individuals and society as a whole, Yoc "is better regarded as striving to be what Steinbeck respects as the best imperfect man can hope to be in an imperfect universe." 

------------------------

30 Ibid., p. 127.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Steinbeck, John


VITA

James Randolph Fitzgerald, son of Bethel Louise Stapleton and Charles Randolph Fitzgerald of Charlottesville, Virginia, was born on December 23, 1941.

He was graduated from Albemarle High School in Charlottesville in 1959. He matriculated at Richmond College of the University of Richmond in September 1959 and was graduated in June 1963 with the Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in English. He commenced his graduate program at the University of Richmond during the summer of 1963 and received the Master of Arts Degree in August 1964.

In August 1961, he married Barbara Ann Goodman of Keswick, Albemarle County, Virginia.

Fitzgerald has accepted a position as assistant professor of English on the faculty of Tift College, Forsyth, Georgia. His duties there commence September 1964.