THE FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

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PREFACE

During my years in high school, as well as my first two years as an undergraduate in college, I had little interest in literature. Whenever one of my teachers assigned a novel, I would skim through it as fast as I could, or have a half-hour review session with someone who did the assignment properly. But more often than not, I would ignore the assignment completely. When the assignment was to read a novel written by John Steinbeck, I would start to go through my usual process of trying to get the major ideas by reading one word from each sentence and work my way up to one sentence from each paragraph. However, the more sentences I read, the more I wanted to read, and ultimately I found myself reading the entire novel, word by word.

My case is by no means rare. I have been teaching literature in some capacity for two and a half years. Often I have had students as hostile to the idea of reading an entire novel as I once was. But invariably when I assign a book report (which means the student must read the entire book), at least one-third of the class will report on a novel by John Steinbeck. The question immediately arises: "Why does Steinbeck have such great appeal?" He is not only popular among the usually apathetic students, but also among the common readers in America, as well as France, Germany, Egypt and Russia. The obvious answer is that he is a good story-teller and writes in a clear, often almost conversational style.

Perhaps five years ago this answer would have satisfied me. But now, as I am close to receiving my Doctor of Philosophy degree in English literature, this answer seems to be too simple. It is not enough to say that Steinbeck tells a good story and dismiss it at that. Instead, there must be an element in Steinbeck's writing that has made practically every one of his novels successful. It is my contention that this element is specifically Steinbeck's portrayal of character. This does not imply that all of his characters are capable of engaging the average reader's attention. On the contrary, it is one type of character that makes the reader want to read the entire novel rather than the first sentence of each paragraph. This character is the grotesque.

The purpose of this study is to examine the many different grotesque characters that appear in the novels and short stories of John Steinbeck. I propose to take a sampling of Steinbeck's work and show the reader what makes the main characters grotesque. Secondly, I will show how Steinbeck creates different kinds of grotesques and finally I will try to determine the reason why this author created so many characters of this type.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Samuel Woods and Dr. Clinton Keeler for their assistance. But most of all I want to sincerely thank Dr. Peter Rollins (and his companion "Ben") for being the major guiding force from the beginning to the end of my effort. I also want to extend a note of thanks for Dr. Harry Campbell for being an inspiration throughout my career as a student pursuing the Doctoral degree.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSCENDENTAL GROTESQUE

In The Log From the Sea of Cortez, John Steinbeck gives an account of an expedition he and his good friend, marine-biologist Ed Ricketts, took in 1940. The primary purpose of the trip was to collect marine invertebrates from the shores and beaches of the Gulf of California. One of the beach-towns in which they searched for specimens was Loreto. Steinbeck records his observation of how the simple villagers looked and felt about him and his traveling companions:

> How strange we were in Loreto! Our trousers were dark, not white; the silly caps we wore were so outlandish that no store in Loreto would think of stocking them. We were neither soldiers nor sailors--the little girls just couldn't take it. We could hear their strangled giggling from around the corner. Now and then they peeked back around the corner to verify for themselves our ridiculousness, and then giggled again while their elders hissed in disapproval. And one woman standing in a lovely garden shaded with purple bouguin-villaea explained, "Everyone knows what silly things girls are. You must forgive their ill manners; they will be ashamed later on." But we felt that the silly girls had something worthwhile in their attitude. They were definitely amused. It is often so, particularly in our country, that the first reaction to strangeness is fear and hatred; we much preferred the laughter (p. 176).

Steinbeck realized that within this little community he was an anomaly. His language, his ideas, his background, and his appearance isolated him from the Loreto natives. But as Steinbeck points out, in this case at least, the disparity between the village norm and his group was a cause for good humor. Although he and his companions were isolated,

it was an isolation that had no lasting harm because he was not a permanent member of the community.

But Steinbeck is an American and as an American his primary concern is with the nature of his fellow countrymen rather than village natives. Thus, he considers how the citizens of his own country would act in a comparable situation. Although he does not like admitting it, he knows that Americans respond to the strange with "fear and hatred." Steinbeck realizes that the Loreto villagers found him grotesque. Yet, although there was some initial, light derision, this did not prevent the villagers from eventually accepting Steinbeck and his companions. In America, Steinbeck believes the relationship between the outsider and the established norm is quite different. Those who are physically or mentally different from the majority are condemned for their grotesqueness.

Defining the Grotesque

In Sea of Cortez as well as in most of his other work, Steinbeck writes about the mental and physical grotesque individual. Yet nowhere does he actually give a definition of the grotesque. Nor does he ever explicitly explain the function of the grotesque in his work. The purpose of this study is to examine the specific function of the grotesque men and women in Steinbeck's work, but before we begin this task it is important to develop a working definition of the term "grotesque." In order to do this let us examine the relationship between the grotesque individual and his peers within a specific literary work. The grotesque individual in literature, especially modern literature, is grotesque insofar as he does not conform to the physical or mental standards of the majority or the "norm" of society. This individual who is unusual in

physical appearance, mental capacity, or moral outlook is deemed grotesque by his society because he is different from this society. Most often the individual does not desire isolation, but the lack of understanding between the man and his surroundings makes isolation inevitable. The modern artist thus creates a grotesque figure to show the dimension of suffering experienced by the individual who does not, cannot, or will not conform.

Because the actual nature of the grotesque differs with every author that portrays it, there is only one general assumption that can be made: "grotesque" is a relative term. The grotesque figure takes on its grotesqueness as a result of its relationship to either the environment in which it appears, or its relationship to the author's view of reality. Oftentimes one of these relationships excludes the other. For example, in The Scarlet Letter neither Dimmesdale nor Chillingworth is considered grotesque by the Puritan community. Yet, Hawthorne presents both these characters as being so obsessed with guilt (in the case of Dimmesdale) and the need for revenge (Chillingworth) that Hawthorne convinces us that, in his mind, these two characters are grotesque. On the other hand, in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" while Robin is an absurd figure in the eyes of the townspeople, he is Hawthorne's representative of the "norm." Hawthorne's grotesques in this story are actually the townspeople themselves, of which the half-black, half-red man and the scarlet-petticoated prostitute are representatives.

When an author creates the grotesque, he must first establish a measuring stick--normality. Each environment, society, or community has its view of normality, and we consider something grotesque when it differs from the standards of this view. After the author depicts the fictional norm's views on normality, his ideas concerning these standards are then

to be taken into consideration. This is necessary because the fictional status quo does not necessarily mean that the creator of that status quo has given it his approbation. The reader views each character in terms of his relationship to the social mores. When the author approves of the standards of the society portrayed, the reader does not consider the conforming character to be grotesque. On the other hand, if the artist disapproves of the values and roles defined as normal by the society, the conforming individual is seen as having to suffer distortion to fit a collective grotesque. In this latter case, the non-conformist becomes an alienated hero.

Steinbeck and the Grotesque

In most of Steinbeck's work the author champions the grotesque, the underdog, and the alienated. Steinbeck is often skeptical of the American status quo and because of this, many of his detractors seem to look upon him as if he were as grotesque as the characters he creates. Two of Steinbeck's novels have forced various critics to label him "cynic," "radical" and even "Communist." Stanley Cooperman writes of In Dubious Battle, "Neither with a detachment and clarity that simply could not be limited to any ideological pigeonhole, the book antagonized conservatives and outraged the radicals, who considered blasphemous any hint that economic struggles were more complicated than a simple good guy vs. bad guy formula. For Steinbeck, even in his early career (when radicalism was a fashionable posture for the literati) refused to choose up sides."[1] When In Dubious Battle was published in 1936 the "conservatives" believed that the novel was nothing more than an exhortation to organize for a rebellion against the capitalistic system. "Radicals" objected to the

novel because they believed that the Party members were portrayed as monsters, totally devoid of humane values. The Grapes of Wrath (1939) also engendered many hostile responses. As Martin Staples Shockley points out, "Many Oklahomans felt that Steinbeck was treating the migrant laborers with derision and irreverence."[2] On the other hand, many felt that the novel's unsympathetic treatment of the Owner's Associations in contrast to the highly sympathetic treatment of the "Okies" was further corroboration that Steinbeck was a "red."

Fortunately the inadequacy of early Steinbeck criticism has been established by numerous literary and social critics over the last thirty years. As we have moved away from the heated literary battles of the thirties however, we have not generated an accurate label for Steinbeck. One label would have to be grotesque. He does not merely create the alienated individual, but he feels that he himself is an alienated individual. At times, he has isolated himself from much of his society because he refuses to change his philosophical attitudes. But as far as Steinbeck's philosophy is concerned, the term transcendentalism is the most appropriate. The group-organism ideal sounds as if it was largely taken from 19th century American transcendental thought. Fredrick I. Carpenter sees traces of this type of transcendentalism in The Grapes of Wrath. He says of Casy, the preacher, "Unorthodox Jim Casy went into the Oklahoma wilderness to save his soul. And in the wilderness he experienced the religious feeling of identity with nature which has always been the transcendental mysticism."[3]

Still, we must realize that while Steinbeck sees Jim Casy as an ideal, he also realizes that, in contemporary society, the Jim Casys are the grotesques. The status quo of the 20th century is not comprised of

the men who love nature, the land, and therefore these men, not being part of the status quo are outcasts. They refuse to make concessions to a materialistic society and as a result they can never be a part of this society. Jim Casy, Joseph Wayne in To A God Unknown, Samuel Hamilton in East of Eden, and Jim Nolan of In Dubious Battle are all dreamers who live according to their various ideals of transcendental unity. For this reason, Steinbeck portrays them as being intransigent dreamers. Their abnormal dreams frequently lead to obsession and monomania. Because they cannot blend realistic thinking with their idealism these transcendentalist grotesques are crushed by a callous society.

The Formative Elements

Steinbeck's beliefs concerning transcendentalism and the grotesque did not really come into fruition until he developed his friendship with biologist Ed Ricketts. With the help of Ricketts, in The Log From the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck was able to put into concrete form a rather abstract system of thinking. Although many of the ideas expressed in Sea of Cortez are present in much of the work previous to the expedition recorded in this journal, nowhere else does Steinbeck so systematically articulate the rationale behind his thinking.

In the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck records how he discovered that transcendental unity does not merely apply to a unity of humanity, but to all of creation:

> Our own interest lay in relationships of animal to animal. If one observes in this relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational to the point where an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. And then not only the meaning but the feeling about species grows misty. One merges into another, groups melt into

> ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it (p. 218).

Steinbeck is a celebrator not only of that which has an organic nature, or of that which has a natural physical beauty, but of everything that is not harmful or destructive to life. Even the machine often finds a place in Steinbeck's affections. Granted, these are not the bulldozers destroying the Okies' houses in The Grapes of Wrath, but we must remember that the "Monster" Bank is controlling both man and machine. Steinbeck sees the machine as a beautiful object when it works in concert with the man who operates it, and when this man is the controlling factor in the relationship. In Sea of Cortez Steinbeck praises the way in which Tex, the engineer, skillfully maintains and directs the powerful engine of the vessel. In the same light, Steinbeck admires the way in which Tony, owner of the ship the Western Flyer, seems to be able to understand the various moods of his ship. Tony, according to Steinbeck, treats his ship as though it were a living creature.

We have seen that Steinbeck's ideal man is one who feels a sense of unity with his fellow man as well as with the object of his work (whether it be land or machine). If we are to understand Steinbeck's ideals completely, we must explore his concept of teleological thinking as opposed to nonteleological thinking. Steinbeck defines teleology in Sea of Cortez as "The assumption of pre-determined design, purpose, or ends in Nature by which an explanation of phenomena is postulated" (p. 275). Teleological study is the observation of the various "means" first in isolation, and second in how these means cause the "ends." For Steinbeck, the teleologist seems to refuse to accept life as it is. Steinbeck, asserting

his position as a nonteleological thinker, pointedly repeats the phrase "It's so because it's so." According to Steinbeck, teleological thinking gets so bogged down in causes that the causes become more important than the effects. Steinbeck does not deny the importance of these causes, but the importance lies in the interrelationship of the parts that make up the whole. The causes are not things that once existed and now have outlived their function--they are always existing as long as the progeny of these things exist. Thus, the nonteleological thinker examines what <u>is</u> in the present and considers the possibilities of this present.

For Steinbeck teleological thinking is the only process that can reveal, as he states, the "ALL TRUTH." This is the universal reality, that has no spatial or temporal boundaries. Any present organism, whether it be man, plant, or animal, is never the ALL TRUTH in itself. It is merely part of the truth found in the ancestry that encompasses every previous organism. Its responses are due to responses of its species that have existed since the beginning of the species' existence. For example, some of the stimuli that affect twentieth-century man are evidence that the past is an integral and consistently functional part of his entire being:

> Perhaps in our pre-humanity the sound of doves was a signal that the day was over and night of terror due--a night which perhaps this time was permanent. Keyed to the visual symbol of the sinking sun and to the odor symbol of the cooling earth, these might all cause the little spasm of sorrow; and with the long response history, one alone of these symbols might suffice for all three. The smell of a musking goat is not in our experience, but it is in some experience, for smelled faintly or in perfume, it is not without its effect even on those who have not smelled the passionate odor of and nor seen the play which follows into discharge. But some great group of shepherd peoples must have know the odor and its results, and must, from the goat's excitement, have taken a very strong suggestion. Even now, a city man is stirred deeply when he smells it in the perfume on a girl's hair (p. 188).

In this passage there are two relationships implied. First, there is the interrelationship of all forms of life. Steinbeck points to the effect of musk to suggest that a specific stimulus affects man and animal in the same way. Also implied is the relationship between all men of the past to all men of the present. Shepherds of an earlier age have known the "musking goat." However, although the animal may not be a part of our modern civilization, the modern man, like the shepherd, finds the aphrodisiac effect of the musk biologically inescapable. Like the phrase "It's so because it's so," Steinbeck would also say, "A man is a man because that is what he is and always has been." All men are related because of an eternal racial consciousness and similar physiological structure. All living organisms are related because, on a scientific (or more specifically nonteleological) level if something lives, no matter what it is, the biological instincts will determine the direction that the life will take.

This brings us to a definition of the Steinbeck concept of the group-organism. On a very abstract level, all living things and all things that ever lived are a part of the group-organism of life. Steinbeck realizes the amorphousness of this abstraction and thus in the Sea of Cortez he tries to show how this romantic notion has concrete application. In order to do this, he applies the group-organism concept to some of the marine organisms studied on the expedition, such as the Cliona and Steletta sponges. He gives the collective label "group-organism" to those organisms that appear to be living together symbiotically. This unity of the "group-organism" is called the "commensal tie":

> It would seem that the communal idea is a very elastic thing and can be extended to include more than host and guest, that certain kinds of animals are often found together for a number of reasons. One, because they do not eat one another; two, because these different species thrive best under identical

> conditions of wave-shock and bottom; three, because they take the same kinds of food, or different aspects of the same kinds of food; four, because in some cases the armor or weapons of some are protection to the others (for instance, the sharp spines of an urchin may protect a tide pool johnny from a larger preying fish); five, because some actual commensal partition of activities may truly occur. Thus the commensal tie may be loose or very tight and some association may partake of a real thigmotropism (p. 208).

The observation made concerning the "commensal tie" of marine organisms serves to corroborate and organize Steinbeck's philosophical ideals. In his fiction he applies the "commensal tie" and "group-organism" concepts to humans rather than animals. Speaking of Steinbeck's concern for humans, Joseph Warren Beach states, "He has been interested in people from the beginning, from long before he had any theory to account for their ways. What is more, he is positively fond of people. More especially he has shown himself fond of men who work for bread in the open air, on a background of fields and mountains."[4] Beach is describing the people of Steinbeck's "commensal tie" or group-organisms. They are men and women who live harmoniously with one another and with their environment, and are concerned with the safety of all within their group. While these theories were not publicly connected with Steinbeck until the publication of Sea of Cortez in 1941, it is safe to assume that Steinbeck's interest in these ideas began in the early 1920's when he studied science at Stanford. Thus, the interest is reflected in his writings as early as 1932 with the appearance of The Pastures of Heaven. In this novel, as well as in Tortilla Flat (1935), In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), and The Grapes of Wrath (1939) the human "group-organisms" are very much in evidence. After Sea of Cortez the "commensal tie" theme continues in works such as The Moon Is Down (1942), Cannery Row (1945), and Sweet Thursday (1954).

When we look at the "group-organism" in the Steinbeck novel, we are able to detect a fundamental difference between the concept as it is presented in relation to marine life and as it is presented in relation to mankind. In Sea of Cortez Steinbeck explains that a "commensal tie" is formed for the sake of survival. While this may also be true of the "commensal ties" of the laborers in The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle, as well as of the derelicts in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, there is an element other than survival which engenders the forming of the "group-organism." This is simply the desire for happiness. The interrelationships materialize because each individual realizes that he can only be happy when he becomes a part of something larger than himself. For example, the Palace Flophouse boys of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday do not come together because they feel that surviving in isolation is impossible. They form communities simply because they feel lonely, and living together is the only kind of life-style that will eradicate loneliness.

Unfortunately the human "group-organism" is, as Steinbeck sees it, a state of existence that is rarely attainable. Americans are not gregarious by nature. Thus, when society sees an individual who wants to be part of a "commensal tie," it grows skeptical of that individual. It is the nature of modern man to be cautious and afraid of the friendly and the aggressive. In America and Americans, his last full-length documentary, Steinbeck explains that America has always been a land of isolated individuals and isolated ethnic groups. Initially, the need to survive caused the majority to think that isolation was necessary. Mixing with other groups would only cause hostility, war, and possible extinction.

But then a new generation realized that survival was not even desirable if total unity of all America could not be achieved:

> What happened is one of the strange quirks of human nature--but perhaps it is a perfectly natural direction that was taken, since no child can long endure his parents. It seemed people could bring to bear, the children of each ethnic group denied their background and their ancestral language. Despite the anger, the contempt, the jealousy, the self-imposed ghettos and segregation, something was loose in this land called America. Its people were Americans. The new generations wanted to be Americans more than they wanted to be Poles or Germans or Hungarians or Italians or British. They wanted this and they did it. America was not planned, it became. Plans made for it fell apart, were forgotten. From being a polyglot nation, Americans became the worst linguists in the world (p. 16).

What Steinbeck is actually describing is the birth of patriotism. This ideal was fine as long as it served the purpose that was originally intended; to unify all isolated groups into one group called "Americans." Unfortunately, as Steinbeck points out in much of his fiction, this pure patriotism that the youth proposed became polluted by chauvinism and greed. Ironically, the initial desire to merge isolated groups into a single national identity has caused more groups and more isolation. In Steinbeck's work there are two basic types of groups. There is the kind that we witness in the Palace Flophouse boys--those that believe happiness comes from each group member helping and interacting with every other group member. The second type of group are the organizations and societies that impose isolation on the first type because, as "Americans," as "do-gooders," it is their self-appointed duty to keep the country and the community free from undesirables. In <u>America and Americans</u>, Steinbeck lists some of these special societies:

> Along with the veteran's organizations Americans have developed scores of orders, lodges and encampments, courts--some simple insurance organizations, some burial agreements, some charitable organizations; but all, all noble. Anyone who has lived long enough will remember some of these as an enrichment of his

> youth. Elks, Masons, Knight Templars, Woodmen of the World, Redmen, Eagles, Eastern Star, Foresters, Concatenated Order of Who's Who . . . all were and perhaps still are aristocrats and therefore exclusive. They seemed to fulfill a need for grandeur against a background of commonness, for aristocracy in the midst of democracy. And the ritual perhaps satisfied the nostalgia of the Protestant for the fulsome litany and ritual of the denounced Catholic Church. And then the Catholics formed their own orders, their own knighthoods and clubs, and that kind of ruined the whole thing (pp. 89-90).

What Steinbeck is talking about is the type of people who compose the overwhelming majority of America. The "orders" are a means of obtaining personal prestige and a way of separating oneself from those "below" him by belonging to something that is exclusive. But although the Knights and the Elks may be exclusive, the basic motivating force for belonging to these groups is not exclusive at all. The desire for wealth and status is not restricted to the members of clubs and orders. It knows no class boundaries, but what is more important to the work of Steinbeck, it knows no rules. "The rules fall away in chunks and in the vacant place we have a generality: 'It's all right because everybody does it'" (p. 170). The New Baytown citizens in The Winter of Our Discontent, the French government in The Short Reign of Pippin IV, the grower's associations and their community employees in both The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle, the attackers in "The Raid" and the executioners in "The Vigilante" are all examples of the conforming norm--conforming to selfishness and brutality.

In the Sea of Cortez Steinbeck observes that there is a "cycle of dominance" in America. The individual who has "captured" the wealth has subsequently captured the security and the power within each community. In his victory he has forced others out who did not have the strength nor the desire for this power. Those who cannot dominate either submit to

the power, or are isolated from the community. These are Steinbeck's outcasts and grotesques. By being excluded from the material advantages, they develop a strong urge to survive. By being excluded from social circles, they develop the urge to unite among themselves. In the meantime, "The dominant, in his security, grows soft and fearful. He spends a great part of his time in protecting himself." Ironically, the isolators become isolated because each man grows paranoid. Meanwhile, the outcasts have unified and "having nothing to lose and all to gain, these select hungry and rapacious ones develop attack rather than defense techniques, and become strong in them, so that one day the dominant man is eliminated and the strong and hungry wanderer takes his place" (p. 97).

This "one day" does not actually occur in Steinbeck's fiction, but the promise of the grotesque becoming the dominant force can be found in all of his work. Mac and Jim Nolan's purpose in In Dubious Battle is to destroy the ruling class. They attempt this by organizing masses of people whom large land owners have tried to manipulate. Tom Joad in The Grapes of Wrath promises his mother that he will devote his life to uniting the poor and the weak. In the last passage of East of Eden, Adam Trask says to his son Cal the word "timshel" meaning "thou mayest." The message is that despite the evils inherent in all of modern civilization, each individual may, e.g., has the power to, commit his own goodness to the task of overcoming all corruption, and enlist others to act similarly. In The Winter of Our Discontent, Ethan Hawley, apparently beaten by the status quo of immoral practice in New Baytown, is about to commit suicide. Suddenly, he feels the talisman in his pocket, a symbol of his ancestors' dignity and incorruptibility. He acquires a new fortitude and resolves to change the immorality of his own family, and subsequently that of the

entire community. Tom Joad, Cal Trask, and Ethan Hawley are what Steinbeck calls "mutations." This is also a term that he derives from the Sea of Cortez when he observes that when two crayfish meet, they invariably fight unless a mutation of the species occurs to prevent the fighting. Tom Joad, Cal Trask, and Ethan Hawley are human mutations that provide the only hope for preventing a world of individual ruthlessness, economic competition, massive war, and social discord. Steinbeck's novels and short stories point toward the day when this mutation will be the norm.

While most of Steinbeck's grotesques are altruistic, there are many grotesques within his work who seem to be more closely related to the disapproved callous norm. These characters, like the Americans discussed in America and Americans, are solely interested in either wealth and/or status among their peers. In many instances, the desire for recognition pervades their entire existence until they have no personality apart from the desire. Henry Morgan, in Steinbeck's first novel, The Cup of Gold (1929), spends the main portion of his life seeking ways to enhance his reputation as a successful pirate. He mercilessly robs and kills just for the sake of proving his supremacy in the world of piracy. Cathy Trask, in East of Eden (who is probably the most extreme grotesque in all of Steinbeck's work), kills her parents, shoots her husband, and works her way into a position where she can ruin the reputation of her community's most eminent citizens.

The difference between a grotesque like Cathy Trask and Ma Joad (part of a collective grotesque) is obvious. The former is evil and totally self-centered while the latter is benevolent. Yet, more important than this difference is the fact that Steinbeck's evil grotesques

are invariably doomed to failure and death. True, the other type of grotesques often die. Lennie Small, Danny the Paisano, Samuel Hamilton, and Jim Casy die before they have accomplished all that they wished in life. However, as parts of a larger group, their deaths do not signify total destruction. When they die, they inspire in others a stronger need for adding to and strengthening the human "commensal tie."

Steinbeck's ideas related to the transcendentalist grotesque fall into three basic classes. The first of these ideas concerns the racial tie of all species, with, of course, an emphasis on man. Secondly, if one is a transcendental grotesque, he feels a unity with his fellow man, as well as with the land, and he has a genuine love for both man and nature. Conversely, this grotesque has no sympathy with the ideals of contemporary society, since contemporary society has no sympathy with his ideals. While Steinbeck may overstate the first idea (for example, we experience sexual stimulation from the smell of musk) the idea, for the most part, is sound. Yet, it is neither original nor profound. The modern scientific sensibility will not deny that all modern species have characteristics similar to those of their ancestors. But Steinbeck takes this basic scientific theory and taints it with his mysticism. The combination becomes romantic idealism. It has been pointed out that this ideal of all men living harmoniously with themselves and their environment is never realized within the course of a Steinbeck novel. It is touched upon with the paisanos of Tortilla Flat and the derelicts of Cannery Row, but neither of these groups can perpetuate themselves indefinitely like the marine commensal ties presented in Sea of Cortez. Why then does Steinbeck continually pose this impossible dream? The answer must lie in the third criterion--the concept of the grotesque itself.

The following chapters will examine the grotesques in Steinbeck's work and from this examination, hopefully we will discover why Steinbeck's heroes are always failures and outcasts.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Stanley Cooperman, The Major Works of John Steinbeck (New York: Monarch Press, 1964).

[2]Martin Staples Shockley, "The Reception of The Grapes of Wrath in Oklahoma," rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 231.

[3]Fredrick I. Carpenter, "The Philosophical Joads," rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 243.

[4]Joseph Warren Beach, "John Steinbeck: Art and Propaganda," rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 250.

CHAPTER II

STEINBECK'S CONFESSION: EAST OF EDEN

While writing East of Eden (1951), Steinbeck kept a journal in which each day he would write a letter to his friend and publisher, Pascal Covici. In these letters (published in 1969 under the title Journal of a Novel) Steinbeck explained his impressions and feelings about the novel and its progress. In the Journal Steinbeck revealed that working on East of Eden had become his most important task: "I have been writing on this book all my life. And throughout, you will find things that remind you of earlier work. The earlier work was practice for this, I am sure. And that is why I want this book to be good, because it is the first book. The rest was practice. I want it to be all forms, all methods, all approaches" (p. 152). Perhaps Steinbeck was placing too much emphasis upon this one novel. Certainly he attempted to incorporate too much into this single work. As a result East of Eden is one of his most uneven works. This is clearly seen when we consider that the main action of the novel concerns Adam Trask and the three generations of the Trask family. Yet, Steinbeck felt that he had to also document the history of his own family and its relationship to the Salinas Valley. Unfortunately, instead of blending the two stories, the author forced the Hamilton section to intrude upon the Trask section. The Journal reveals that Steinbeck was unable to see how much confusion he was creating.

Immediately we must ask ourselves, "What does this obtrusive subjectivity tell us about Steinbeck the man?" While East of Eden is one of Steinbeck's last novels, we should examine it first if we are to learn about the relationship between John Steinbeck and his fictive characters. East of Eden is by no means Steinbeck's most important novel. Yet it is fertile for an understanding of Steinbeck's grotesque characters, characters who shed light on the grotesque within John Steinbeck himself.

The need to write a perfect East of Eden became Steinbeck's obsession. While writing Part Three of the novel he confided to his Journal, "I suppose I am becoming a monomaniac about the book. Everything takes place about it from the blackest of magic to the purest of science" (p. 158). His devotion to writing this novel becomes more apparent when we find that he admitted he could not even begin to connect the novel with any idea of monetary gain: "if I knew right now that this book would not sell a thousand copies, I would still write it" (pp. 72-73). In short, East of Eden was not merely part of Steinbeck's life, it was his whole life: "No matter what I do, the story is always there--waiting and working kind of like a fermenting mash out of which whiskey will be made eventually but meanwhile the mash bubbles and works and makes foam. And it is very interesting but the product that is wished for--devoutly wished for--is the whiskey. All the turmoil and boiling is of no use to anyone" (p. 24).

The Journal would be interesting if it revealed nothing but Steinbeck's attitudes toward what he considered to be his most important life's work. But the Journal takes on an added significance when we consider that many of Steinbeck's grotesques are monomaniacs and the Journal suggests that many of these characters are reflections of their creator.

We see this character-creator relationship when we realize that in the Journal Steinbeck made a very conscious effort to explore himself mentally and physically in the same manner that he explored the characters of East of Eden. He felt that a full awareness of his motives would help him to write a better book. His first insight was that just by the nature of his profession, he was an outcast. As a writer he had to perpetually work at "the clumsy attempt to find symbols for the wordlessness. In utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable" (p. 3). And because it is only the writer who knows the explanation, Steinbeck felt he was doomed to be misunderstood by both critics and readers alike. Steinbeck said that by being a writer he was one who was "creatively destroying" himself. Yet writing remained his primary joy. The destruction came in being misunderstood but the compensation came in creating. Occasionally the joy of creating was so intense that Steinbeck felt himself losing a grip on rational thinking: "there is so much violence in me. Sometimes I am horrified at the amount of it. It isn't very well concealed either. It is very close to the surface" (p. 61). Sometimes this violence manifested itself in a mild fashion. Often while writing in the Journal he engaged in doodling, or what he called "pencil trifling." He admitted that this was his eccentricity, his inability to control a useless endeavor. But often this violence became so potent that Steinbeck felt he was actually a beast. At a gathering of people, he found that he could not be "a part of such things and I guess I have always wanted to. But something cuts me off always . . . maybe I too am a monster" (p. 69-70). Although in being a "monster" he was not directly hurting anyone else, he found that what made him monstrous was the inability to control the violence that often made his thoughts seem

perverted: "This morning I am amazed at the utterly despicable quality of my thinking. And these are just as definitely a part of me as the thoughts of which I can approve" (p. 112). Midway through the Journal, Steinbeck revealed that his inability to control the "monster" within led to a self-loathing. He found that although he did not have a death-wish, neither could he perceive any will to live. He claimed that he had neither any ego nor any sense of what he termed competitiveness (e.g., a need to prove superiority). His incipient beast sporadically showed its head and convinced him of his evil nature. Although in the course of the Journal itself Steinbeck never adequately explains what he means by his "evil," we can look to some of the characters in East of Eden to find the author's "evil alter-egos."

As the title itself implies, the problem of evil is the central idea in East of Eden. Steinbeck saw in himself an evil quality that was constantly trying to subjugate his moral sense. Thus, he presented in the novel various characters who were undergoing a similar kind of psychological struggle. Steinbeck believed that from the time that the individual is old enough to make moral decisions, his good and evil natures battle for dominance. Each person has the capability to help himself become moral or immoral. In East of Eden this capability is called "timshel" which the Chinese servant Lee interprets as meaning "thou mayest." "Timshel" is what Adam said to Cain when Cain asked if he could have his father's love. Steinbeck (through Lee) shows that the traditional interpretation of the word has been "thou shalt." But this implies that one is not totally responsible for his actions. Lee and his relatives spend hours studying the word and come to the conclusion that the father meant to tell his son that his future was entirely up to him. Every human

being has this knowledge of "timshel," e.g., that one is capable of choosing between good and evil. According to Steinbeck, the concept of "timshel" is the basis for the story of East of Eden and "this one story is the basis of all human neurosis." For when one realizes that he is capable of being virtuous, and yet he chooses not to be so, the recognition of the nature of his choice engenders self-loathing.

When Steinbeck first sat down to begin East of Eden he wrote in the Journal, "I will tell them one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest story of all--the story of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of love and hate, of beauty and ugliness. I shall try to demonstrate to them how these doubles are inseparable--how neither can exist without the other" (p. 2). Joseph Fontenrose is correct in assuming that Steinbeck's intent was to show that there is "good and bad in everyone, and that some bad is necessary" because it is the evil in man that works as a catalyst for his goodness.[1] Yet, although this was Steinbeck's intent, his sense of his own evil, of his own grotesqueness, would not let him portray characters in which this ideal dialectical tension operated. Although the psychic battle between good and evil is fought in all of the major characters, the battles are too consciously fought, the people are so aware of their evil force (or in Cathy's case of the benevolent force) that their fights become monomanias and the psychological balance that is supposed to result is often transformed into one-sided eccentricity.

Adam Trask's mother and father, as well as Liza Hamilton, are examples of these eccentric monomaniacs. All three are dissatisfied with the human condition and so they try to impose an order on at least their own lives. Adam's mother and Liza Hamilton become religious fanatics while Cyrus tries to convert his family into a monolithic militaristic

unit. Steinbeck presents these characters to show different ways that individuals try to conquer their evil impulses. But no matter what is intended, the author is actually straying from his purpose. East of Eden is Steinbeck's professed attempt at purging himself of his "beast" (e.g., his evil tendencies). This simply is not done when he portrays a melange of eccentric caricatures that bear no resemblance to the author.

As far as the minor characters are concerned, Steinbeck does not fulfill his purpose until he portrays Tom Hamilton. While writing the Tom Hamilton sections, Steinbeck revealed in the Journal, "I am deep in Tom now. Last night I dreamed a long dream of my own paralysis and death. It was objective and not at all sad, only interesting. I'm pretty sure this was set off by the study of Tom Hamilton. I hope you will like the study of Tom. It is very close and I think very true and also it is very important to our story. It is one of the keys to the story and the story attempts to be a kind of key to living" (p. 142). Tom is developed effectively because Steinbeck seems to be making his passionate--perhaps even grotesque confession through the character of Tom Hamilton. Steinbeck needed to relieve the psychological stress that self-hatred caused. By exposing this self-hatred, he felt the pressure could be vented. When Tom comes to realize the nature of his evil half, and this realization is written down (by Steinbeck) the act of writing serves to alleviate the self-disgust:

> And his name was called shrilly in his ears. His mind walked in to face the accusers: Vanity, which charged him with being ill dressed and dirty and vulgar; and Lust, slipping him the money for his whoring; Dishonesty, to make him pretend thought and talent that he did not have; Laziness and Gluttony arm in arm. Tom felt comforted by these because they screened the great Gray One in the back seat, waiting--the gray and dreadful crime. He dredged up lesser things, used small things almost like virtues to save himself. There were Covetousness

> of Will's money, Treason towards his mother's God. Theft of time and hope, sick Rejection of love (p. 363).

There are two parallels between Tom and Steinbeck that are significant in analyzing both the character and his creator. The first of these lies in their misplaced pride in being free from conventional morality. Up to the time of writing East of Eden (1951) Steinbeck's heroes and ideal men were heroic and ideal largely because of their libidinal drive. Repeatedly, Steinbeck used the word "concupiscent" to describe his favorite characters. But these characters were not merely fictional creations, they were Steinbeck himself displaying a pride for his own lusty nature. But 1951 and the writing of East of Eden marked a change in his life and his literature. The Steinbeck hero was no longer to be the rustic, free-living man's man. In East of Eden Samuel Hamilton sets the new standard by displaying a love and devotion to his family. In Sweet Thursday (1954) even Doc of the earlier Cannery Row has undergone a radical change. He is no longer the beer-drinking, derelict lover who has a different girl in his lab almost every night. Instead, he has changed into an unhappy man who only obtains happiness when he finds a prospective bride and a promise of a settled family life. Ethan Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent achieves fortitude in his ability to remain faithful to his wife and loyal to the moral upbringing of his children. The idealized paisanos of Tortilla Flat and the derelicts of Cannery Row have now become the hopeless drunk Danny Taylor (The Winter of Our Discontent).

The point is that Steinbeck has come to realize that the most important group-unit is the family unit. His early maverick ways led to two divorces and he realizes that he was the one at fault. Because of his

new emphasis upon the family, a large part of the Journal is devoted to reflections on the lives of his two sons. He seems to feel that only through these reflections can he escape the memory of his past licentiousness. Like Steinbeck, Tom Hamilton feels that his inherent irresponsibility is such a dominant part of his nature that he is of value to no one. He believes that his evilness must be punished by the "Gray One" which is of course death. Similarly, Steinbeck writes "Last night I dreamed of my own paralysis and death." He is able to turn this dream into Tom's suicide.

Tom must die because he is unable to accept the fact that all men have both good and evil sides and that he is not exempt from this universal "flaw." Tom is unable to find a compromise or balance between the two poles. He wants to be great and "great" is the word that haunts him from the time he is old enough to have ambition. But his ambition consists merely of the concept of greatness. It has no concrete direction. He does not read books, he swallows them voraciously in an attempt to find a direction for what he is certain is a hidden greatness. As each book fails to reveal this direction and as each of his innovative ideas dwindles to insignificance, he becomes convinced that he is doomed to be a man without greatness. As a result, Tom becomes convinced of his worthlessness. He spends the rest of his life proving this worthlessness to himself by rotting away on a barren farm in solitude, taking only occasional breaks to visit the town brothel. Once he has thoroughly proven the uselessness of his own existence he decides to end that existence. Again we must note a parallel between Tom and Steinbeck. Throughout Steinbeck's career many critics disparaged each of his efforts. While the word "great" is probably too strong to describe Steinbeck's

conception of his work, he at least wanted to consider himself good at his craft. Yet, each new attempt brought self-doubt, because of the hostile criticism.

Tom Hamilton, as well as Adam Trask, cannot live with the knowledge that because they are human beings they must be, at least, partially evil. While Steinbeck also had trouble facing the dilemma of his dual nature, he eventually matured and was able to accept it. In East of Eden the character who symbolizes Steinbeck's new way of thinking is Lee, who also functions as Steinbeck's spokesman. Tom Hamilton is too obsessed with his own failure to listen to the wisdom of Lee but those who believe the Chinaman's philosophy are able to live happily. Because Cal and Adam believe in Lee's teachings concerning the duality of the human spirit they are able to believe in themselves.

Pascal Covici believes that Lee's function in the novel is to serve as a foil for the ignominious Kate (Cathy).

> East of Eden itself consists primarily of an effort to explore a special kind of awareness, that of Lee, and a special kind of unawareness, that of Kate. The other characters arrange themselves along a spectrum of which these two form the extremes. Kate can only use people; she has no sense that emotions are "good" for anything besides exploitation, a lack that blinds her to the very existence of a full humanity. Lee, on the other hand, knows both in feeling and thought what heights and depths--man is capable of experiencing.[2]

It cannot be disputed that Lee's knowledge, or "awareness" as Covici calls it, serves as a measuring stick for judging Cathy. But Lee is not on the end of a "spectrum." He is right in the middle of it. Not only does he pass judgment on Cathy, but each character in the novel rises and falls according to Lee's opinion of him. Steinbeck places Lee in such a central position because Lee is the Steinbeck who feels that he has finally purged himself of his immoral characteristics.

In keeping with the rest of Steinbeck's fictional philosophers, Lee is a grotesque. In his case the grotesqueness is a result of his race. Lee is Chinese and thus people consider him inferior. Like Crooks (Of Mice and Men) another minority group grotesque, Lee's involuntary solitude has developed his insight into the flaws of the rejecting society. But Crooks' wisdom is not inconsistent with his position on the social scale. He has not worked out a philosophical system like that of Lee. His knowledge is more intuitive. He is lonely and thus he is able to perceive that man's greatest pleasure comes from having companionship. Man is foolish to wish for anything more. Lee is a Chinese servant and feels obliged to act like a Chinese servant, although he is more intelligent than his employer. While he has a perfect command of the English language, he speaks in pidgin Chinese simply because Americans expect him to do so. He wears his hair in a queue and dresses in oriental clothing for the same reason. Lee is a phony and despite all his perception concerning the lives of others, he is unable to perceive for himself that his facade is superfluous.

The fault however is not Lee's, it is John Steinbeck's. Lee, like Tom Hamilton, serves as one of Steinbeck's self-portraits. But while Tom's section in which the parallel between Tom Hamilton and John Steinbeck is clear, in Lee's section Steinbeck obfuscates Lee's function by telling us the grotesque story of the Chinaman's origin. We are told that an entire company of railroad laborers raped Lee's mother. Then Steinbeck explains the history of Lee's isolation as a Chinaman in America. Finally, much of Lee's section deals with his complacent acceptance of his social position. All of this is interesting but it adds nothing to Lee's character as we see him in the novel. Steinbeck,

however, felt that he had to make Lee a martyr of loneliness. Only through suffering could both he, the author, and character become profound thinkers. Steinbeck conceived of himself as suffering due to the evil beast inside him. Steinbeck's beast became Lee's self-imposed isolation. As Steinbeck fought the beast, much of his philosophy changed. As Lee contended with his loneliness, he was able to develop the dualistic theory central to the novel. The problem is that the cause and effect is convincing as it is portrayed in Steinbeck's Journal, but in East of Eden the relationship between the cause of Lee's suffering and the ultimate effect of that suffering is contrived so it will satisfy the author. Unfortunately, it does not satisfy the reader.

In the case of Adam Trask, Steinbeck's artistic failure is more pronounced. Although Adam is the central character of the novel, he does little of anything significant. He is not a grotesque, but he spends his entire life having other grotesques mold his personality. He merely experiences the presence of others and never actually imposes himself enough to develop any definite personality. But where Steinbeck failed in creating Adam--the Steinbeck who was the apathetic student needing desperately to be taught, he was entirely successful when he created characters based on his own sons Tom and Catbird. He saw in his own children the embodiments of the dualism so important to East of Eden. Cal and Aron are Steinbeck's symbols for his sons as well as for Cain and Abel. But in being consistent with the novel's theme, Steinbeck shows both Cal and Aron as each possessing the qualities of both Cain and Abel. In other words, in each of the brothers the qualities of good and evil coexist. The reason for this coexistence is that Steinbeck felt that Tom and Catbird constantly displayed both good and evil personality traits.

Steinbeck was most concerned about his son Tom because he felt that the Cain (rebellious) element was constantly trying to assert itself. Steinbeck wrote in the Journal, "Tom needs camp very badly. He needs the supervision of older boys. In many ways he is a baby--less old than he should be. This grows from a frantic desire to be appreciated. He tries to be like Catbird. And like most humans, some of his methods of attracting attention are pretty unattractive and nerve-wracking" (p. 147). Tom was a mischievous boy because he was a jealous boy. His actions may have been "nerve-wracking" but his intentions were directed at gaining the love and respect of his parents. Catbird, being secure in this respect, was naturally well-behaved. But because he took his secure position for granted he was unsympathetic toward his brother's plight.

Aron, Adam's son, is an extension of Catbird. Like Catbird, he is convinced of his own goodness and like Catbird he feels himself superior to his brother. But Aron in Part Four is older than his non-fictional counterpart and in Steinbeck's portrayal of this period in Aron's life the fictional character truly comes alive. Aron is no longer satisfied with being just good. He believes he must be completely pure and that this purity can only be accomplished through religion. Like his grandmother, he begins to create imaginary sins for himself. Of course, in being imaginary they never were or never will be committed, but as long as they are in his mind, he knows he can always confess to his own personal god. He decides on the ministry for his future and spends practically all of his time at the church. He tries to convert his girl friend Abra and his brother Cal. When he finds this task to be hopeless, he simultaneously experiences a sense of joy. Their inability to see Aron's conception of the truth has helped him prove to himself his moral

superiority. He renounces his brother and tells Abra that he vows to remain celibate for the rest of his life. With these acts he believes that his purification is complete.

Because Aron thinks that he is thoroughly virtuous, the Cain in him eventually destroys the Abel. In other words, Aron has grown proud. He believes nothing that has any connection with him can be evil (Cal and Abra are not evil, they are just ignorant). Aron convinces himself that he has complete knowledge of the true nature of man and God. He denies the possibility of the Cain within himself and in doing so he has become sheltered from the world outside of the Episcopal church. Therefore, when Cal forces him to visit the mother that Aron never knew existed--the ignominious keeper of the town's most perverted brothel--Aron feels that he has fallen from his innocent state. His pride is shattered and he enlists in the army with an apparent death-wish. This wish is shortly fulfilled. Aron cannot live knowing the truth about his mother.

While Aron is never able to contend with the possibility of his own evil, Cal, at first, cannot believe that he possesses any degree of goodness. Cal is the most fully developed character in the novel and with the exception of Cathy he is the most interesting. This is probably the reason why the movie East of Eden switched the emphasis from the story of Adam to the story of Cal. Feliciano Relgado believes that if it were not for this revision in the movie, the novel would probably be already forgotten.[3] This view does seem to be somewhat extreme however, because the novel was an instant success upon publication and is still widely read today. Yet, the fact remains that while the novel tries to center on the education of Adam, the education of Cal in Part Four is much more convincing.

The Journal also has two stories, the story of Steinbeck's battle with his own evil and the story of his son Tom. Steinbeck comes to recognize his dual nature within the course of the Journal and so his personal story is complete. In the case of his son, Steinbeck does not end the story until he completes the section on Cal in the novel. The Journal shows Tom's emotional struggle. Throughout the collection of letters Steinbeck wrote about different ways in which Tom displayed his recalcitrance. But underneath the rebelliousness Steinbeck felt certain that there was a goodness desperately trying to assert itself. While working on Part One he wrote, "Gwyn called me yesterday to tell me that Tom is refusing to go to school, fights to stay away, claims he misses the bus. When the two of them stayed overnight with me last week I knew that Tom was in some deep emotional trouble, I could feel it. And I am pretty sure it's a simple feeling of rejection, of not being loved" (p. 32). Four months later the problem seemed to be intensifying: "I think we are winning the battle of Tom but it will be very gradual. I am really quite worried about him. He needs help and right now. Sometime I will tell you about the talk I had with him yesterday. I talked to him as though he were an adult or at least my equal and I think a lot more got through than you can imagine" (p. 153). Despite Steinbeck's efforts Tom continued to go against all parental authority. Steinbeck could not explain why. Three weeks later he wrote, "The day has been saddened by Tom's going on a tangent. It's almost like a sickness. I could feel it coming on this morning and it built and built through all of his symptoms to straight disobedience and now he is in coventry and that is hard on the whole house but it is the only thing that seems to get through to him" (p. 170).

The parallels between Tom and Cal are obvious. Cal also spends much of his time skipping school and misbehaving. Cal believes that Aron is Adam's favorite son. He has a propensity for meanness that even he himself cannot explain. He feels compelled to hang around the streets of the red-light district of Salinas and smoke. While Cal does not frequent the establishments nor does he enjoy smoking, he feels that he must live up to the distorted conception which he has of himself as being completely evil.

As Aron's story goes farther than Catbird's, Cal's goes farther than Tom's. Where the parallels end, the education begins. Steinbeck's talks with Tom seemed to be ineffective. Lee (as Steinbeck's spokesman) has similar talks with Cal but Cal is able to mature as a result. To put it simply, Lee convinces Cal to believe in himself. At first this belief seems to take a distorted form. He puts all of his self-esteem into his hands. He protects them as if his heart resided in his fist. He never cries except when he gets a cut on a finger. Eventually the protection of his hands changes into a protection of his soul. He was mean to his brother and he was disobedient to his father, but with his new growth he begins to feel guilt and with this feeling he begs God to let him be kind like his brother. The climax of Aron's story occurs when he comes face to face with his mother. The same is true of Cal's story. When Cal sees Kate, and realizes what true evil is, he contrasts himself to his mother and is thrilled with the discovery that he is morally superior to another human being. However, he again grows guilt-ridden when he realizes that he has indirectly caused his brother's death by exposing Aron to Kate. But the guilt is overcome with the knowledge that he (Cal) will always have the opportunity to subjugate his share of evil. His father's last

word to him is "Timshel." Adam is saying that Cal is responsible for his own actions. He is not doomed to be a reprobate. If he wants to be a good man he has more of a chance than Aron ever had because he knows what he must conquer.

When Cal sees his mother he begins to consider himself fortunate. Unlike Cathy, Cal is not a creature of pure evil and does not have contempt for the entire world. But Cal's pity for his mother is misplaced. Her happiness actually comes from her ability to prove that she is non-human. As she becomes more wicked she is able to convince herself that she is superior to everyone merely because she punishes people and is extremely happy while punishing.

Cathy Ames is not only the most evil character in East of Eden, but also she is one of the most uniformly evil women in literature. The thesis of East of Eden is that every human being has an equal degree of good and evil. With this thesis in mind, Steinbeck shows the reader why Cathy Ames is not human. He introduces Cathy into the novel with a discussion on monsters:

> I believe there are monsters born in the world to human parents. Some you can see, misshapen and horrible, with huge heads or tiny bodies; some are born with no arms, no legs, some with three arms, some with tails or mouths in odd places. They are accidents and no one's fault, as used to be thought. Once they were considered the visible punishment for concealed sins.
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> And just as there are physical monsters, can there not be mental or psychic monsters born? The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce a malformed soul?
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> Monsters are variations from the accepted normal to a greater or lesser degree. As a child may be born without an arm, so one may be born without kindness or the potential of conscience. A man who loses his arm in an accident has a great struggle to adjust himself to the lack, but one born without

> arms suffers only from people who find him strange. Having never had arms, he cannot miss them. Sometimes when we are little we imagine how it would be to have wings, but there is no reason to suppose it is the same feeling birds have. No, to a monster the norm must seem monstrous, since everyone is normal to himself. To the inner monster it must be even more obscure, since he has no visible thing to compare himself with others. To a man born without conscience, a soul-stricken man must seem ridiculous. To a criminal, honesty is foolish. You must not forget that a monster is only a variation, and that to a monster the norm is monstrous (pp. 62-63).

This passage is extremely important not only to understand Cathy but also to understand the grotesqueness of John Steinbeck. Cathy is the only person in East of Eden treated with the scientific objectivity which Steinbeck claimed he always tried to achieve. The reason for this is not necessarily that Steinbeck as creator is reaching high artistic levels, but actually that Steinbeck cannot control Cathy. He does not know anyone like Cathy Ames so he must step back and let her form her own story. The "monstrous" evil he feels within himself, and his inability to control it, help him in telling Cathy's story. Steinbeck wrote in the Journal that he felt himself limited in portraying Cathy because he was not able to go into her mind. Thus, she could only be treated as a biological mutation. He believed that he observed her actions in the same fashion that he recorded those of a sea-urchin in The Log From the Sea of Cortez. When he tried to interpret her motivations in the Journal he failed because he could not yet understand many of his own motivations. He wrote, "Her life is one of revenge on other people because of a vague feeling of her own lack" (pp. 165-166). But if we look at the novel, we can see that Steinbeck was merely guessing. He had already confessed that he was incapable of analyzing Cathy's thoughts and his attempt at interpretation corroborates this confession. His analysis suggests that Cathy feels envy but nothing in the novel suggests this. As Steinbeck

himself points out in the above passage, the mental monster is quite different from the physical monster. The physically handicapped looks at others and is envious of their completeness. Cathy sees completeness as human weakness. She prides herself on her strength, a hard and brutal absence of tenderness.

Since Cathy lacks ordinary human feelings such as guilt, love, compassion, or envy, the reader, like Steinbeck, cannot consciously identify with her or her story. Nevertheless she fascinates us as an anomaly. We look at her from a clinical point of view and we no more condemn her for burning her parents alive than we would condemn our pet hamster for eating the first two babies born in its litter. Ultimately we realize why Steinbeck told us that he was about to present a person who has no connection with conscience. By the end of the novel we still do not learn about Cathy's motivations, but we do learn about the conscienceless grotesque and we are convinced that Cathy is a monster.

As a child Cathy has an inexplicable trait and air about her that forces others to consider her strange. Like Robbie Maltby, in The Pastures of Heaven, she refuses to conform to the mode of dress and manners of her schoolmates. The reaction of the peers is similar in both cases. Cathy's schoolmates view her reticence and her intransigence with admiration. Instead of ridiculing her, they conform to her styles. The same is true of Robbie's schoolmates. But Cathy is actually nothing like Robbie. Robbie is different from the norm because he is ignorant of their true feelings. When he discovers that adults look upon his pauper style of living with scorn, his pride is deeply hurt. Cathy, on the other hand, will not conform because she is naturally contemptuous of

conformity. From her perspective conformity is merely evidence of another human weakness.

Cathy's story is virtually a history of the way in which she lures her victims into a position where they totally depend upon her for their happiness. When she is sure that she has them in her power, she exposes them as fools for trusting her. The first of her conquests comes when she is twelve years old. She persuades two boys to accompany her into her father's barn and then she seduces them. When her mother catches the three youths, Cathy convinces her that the boys forcibly raped her. When the boys are sent to reform school, she is elated. At fourteen "Cathy developed a little smile, just a hint of a smile. She had a way of looking sideways and down that hinted to a lone boy of secrets he could share." James Grew, Cathy's Latin teacher, is not able to resist her seductive expression. He reaches the point where he stays away from school just so he can maintain control over himself. Eventually he takes to roaming the countryside like a madman. Late one night he comes to the Ames house and demands to speak to Mr. Ames. The author suggests that Grew is going to reveal to Mr. Ames that his daughter is a whore. Ames, however, thinks that Grew is drunk and sends him away. That night the teacher shoots himself in the head. It is one of Cathy's greatest triumphs. A fourteen-year-old girl is able to drive a fully grown man to destruction. When she hears the news at the dinner table, she sits quietly with no detectable sign of emotion. Yet, as she wipes her lips with a napkin, a mysterious smile is present. Although the cannibal symbolism may be unintended, the grotesqueness is blatant. The monster Cathy has been fed by the fate of her victim. As her father is telling the details of the suicide, she continues wiping her lips with her napkin

as though she is brushing away the remnants of her meal. When the story is completed, Cathy puts the napkin down. She has finished her dinner.

A succession of these grotesque "meals" characterizes the rise of Cathy the child to Kate the madam. Cathy uses people until they have grown too smart or their weakness repulses her to the point that she can no longer bear to be with them. When her parents begin to believe that she is evil, she burns them while they are asleep. Then she goes to Boston and finds Mr. Edwards, who runs a chain of brothels. She plays the part of an innocent, destitute child who must resort to prostitution merely to survive. She charms Edwards, and becomes his personal mistress while all the time she is using him. When he discovers her game, he beats her mercilessly and leaves her in a Connecticut field to die of her wounds. In the remainder of the novel Cathy shoots her husband, murders a woman, and establishes a brothel catering to individuals with sado-masochistic needs. She grows enormously wealthy by secretly taking pictures of her clientele while they are engaged in perverted actions and using these pictures for blackmail. She is satisfied with herself not only because of her wealth, but also because of her power.

Covici believes that, "In East of Eden, Kate--an 'incomplete monster,' the author calls her--appears today as an almost allegorical figure representing the incompleteness of a mechanical society which increasingly ignores, thus bringing ever closer its own destruction."[4] Covici actually seems to be giving Steinbeck too much credit in suggesting that Kate has allegorical qualities. This assumes a control over the character that Steinbeck just did not have. The Eden-Adam-Cain and Abel symbolism in the story is obvious. But in Adam and Charles Trask and in Aron and Cal, Steinbeck was dealing with qualities and people well known to him.

Obviously if the Eden allegory is to be complete there must be an Eve figure. But Kate does not satisfy this requirement nor does she represent Satan, no matter how evil she appears to be. Satan tempts Eve, Eve tempts Adam and subsequently all of humanity. Kate is different from both Satan and Eve because she tempts no one. She cares nothing for people because she is convinced they can do nothing for her. Kate uses many individuals to make her comfortable, but she does not actually tempt them. Both Eve and Satan are concerned about the lives of those they tempt. Satan wants men to be immoral so that he will attain their souls. Satan wants to be king of the damned. Eve wants Adam to bite the apple so that she will be sure of his love. But Eve cares about Adam even after the fall. When Kate is able to take care of herself, she does not care whether her victims live or die. She is not concerned with what they think of her, nor does she want them to emulate her. She simply uses and after there is no room for use, she discards. Kate regains her health and she is no longer concerned whether or not Adam Trask lives or dies.

Still, the second part of Covici's statement is accurate. We must concur that Kate destroys herself because of ignorance. Her only goal is to gain power through cheating her victims. She is able to do this because she understands the complexities of human nature. But she does not take time to understand the simplicities. When she poisons Faye, she buries the bottle in the backyard. Ethel, an illiterate prostitute, discovers her. Sometime after Kate has established herself as owner of the house, Ethel reveals that she saw Kate disposing of a bottle the night of Faye's death. Kate panics but her panic is without cause. Ethel thought she saw something but she is not sure what it was and she is not clever

enough to make the connection between the buried bottle and the poisoned woman. Kate, as scrupulous as she is in manipulating the shrewdest of people, has never had to deal with an Ethel. The impulses of the stupid are beyond her comprehension. She automatically believes that Ethel will use this knowledge to ruin her. However, Ethel only begins to sense that Kate has killed Faye after Kate has grown obsequious toward her.

Kate has fallen victim to someone else. It is more than she can bear. She begins to deteriorate both mentally and physically. Her hands become tortured with arthritic pain and she becomes obsessed with the idea that someone has control of her. Finally the physical pains and the mental anguish are so severe that she chooses to kill herself before the law discovers her crime. Like Aron, who is destroyed because he cannot face the fact of his own evil, Kate forces her own death rather than live with the knowledge that there is a part of humanity that can actually threaten her.

Kate had felt an affinity with Alice in Wonderland ever since she was a child. She poisons herself, not expecting death, but expecting that she will be able to join her beloved Alice:

> She thrust her mind back to Alice. In the gray wall opposite there was a nail hole. Alice would be in there. And she would put her arm around Cathy's waist, and they would walk away--best friends--and tiny as the head of a pin.
>
> A warm numbness began to creep into her arms and legs. The pain was going from her hands. Her eyelids felt heavy--very heavy. She yawned.
>
> She thought or said or thought, "Alice doesn't know. I'm going right on past."
>
> Her eyes closed and a dizzy nausea shook her. She opened her eyes and stared about in terror. The gray room darkened and the cone of light rippled like water. And then her eyes closed again and her fingers curled as though they held small breasts.

> And her heart beat solemnly and her breathing slowed as she grew smaller and smaller and then disappeared--and she had never been (p. 490).

Kate had always admired Alice because of her ability to change herself physically. Kate's skill was her uncanny ability to hide her true feelings from everyone, but she could never hide her body. In her demented state of mind she believes that Alice is virtually her god. Alice can become visible but Kate can only make her motives invisible. Kate believes that the poison will not kill her, it will only make finding her impossible.

When Steinbeck writes "and she had never been," he means Cathy's evil has corrupted none of the main characters. They have seen her, experienced her, but she has not destroyed their moral consciousness. Of the various Steinbeck personas, e.g., Adam, Lee, Tom, Samuel, and to a large extent Cal, none takes Cathy seriously in the end. Like Steinbeck, they have observed her and their observations have revealed to them that she has no relationship to their lives because of her monstrousness. Yet, it must be pointed out that Steinbeck disposes of Cathy rather conveniently. This is not to say that her death within the novel is contrived, but the fact that Steinbeck rids the characters of her so completely seems to be wishful thinking on his part. Cathys and Kates in the complete form do not exist. But one does not eradicate the Cathyness of humanity and of each individual merely because one recognizes it. Steinbeck can dispose of a Cathy in a novel but he is proving that he can never really understand his own immorality when he says "and she had never been." He is saying Cathy is gone, and this just is not true. She may be on leave, but as long as Steinbeck is alive she sporadically returns.

No matter how valuable the Journal of a Novel may be for the student of John Steinbeck, in a way it is also quite annoying. Steinbeck tells us that he often found himself thinking licentious, monstrous, perverted, and evil thoughts. Yet, this is as specific as he gets in the Journal, or in any other autobiographical writing. While we obviously can never know exactly what went on in his mind, we can look to East of Eden, as well as many other Steinbeck works, and observe the grotesque characters who are manifestations of this allegedly ignominious mind. Steinbeck makes the biography-fiction parallels for us in the Journal when he writes about the process of creating East of Eden. However, while we do not have this kind of documentation concerning Steinbeck's other works, they still contain many characters whose thoughts and/or actions can be considered licentious, monstrous, and perverted.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 125.

[2]Pascal Covici, Introduction to The Portable Steinbeck (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. xxii.

[3]Feliciano Relgado, "John Steinbeck," Razon Y Fe, Vol. 168 (1963), p. 427.

[4]Covici, p. xxvi.

CHAPTER III

THE COMMUNITY

In many of Steinbeck's novels the protagonists are not single human beings, but communities and towns composed of human beings. Looking at the titles of three of Steinbeck's books we can see that the author wanted to focus the reader's attention on the community. The Pastures of Heaven, Tortilla Flat, and Cannery Row are the only works of Steinbeck that have a specific location for their titles (The Long Valley, referring to the Salinas Valley, is actually a collection of otherwise nonrelated short stories). The Pastures of Heaven contains twelve different chapters, each focusing on different members and aspects of the community. However, all the chapters are related in that each individual story is not only set in the pastures, but also every chapter recalls characters from other chapters. Each story has its protagonist but the book itself collectively has only one protagonist--the community known as the Pastures of Heaven. In the same light, Tortilla Flat is not titled "Danny and the Paisanos." Nor is Cannery Row titled "Mack and the Palace Flophouse Boys." Although these novels deal to a large extent with the activities of the respective "groups," the concentration is not on the actions of these groups in isolation, but on their relationship to the status quo of Monterey.

The Pastures of Heaven

In comparing The Pastures to The Cup of Gold (1929) and To A God Unknown (1933), two of Steinbeck's earliest novels, F. W. Watt comments, "The inhabitants of the valley are portrayed with an attention to social and psychological realism greater than Steinbeck had yet attempted. They make a varied and vivid community."[1] It is true that each major character is unique and distinctive, yet all of them have personality traits that force them to become collective grotesques. No major figure is able to face reality. Nor can any single member of the community be perceptive enough to understand the motives and desires of any other member of the community. As Frederic I. Carpenter observes, the novel is centered on various "dreamers" and because these characters are so involved in their own dreams, they cannot take time to understand the dilemmas of their neighbors.[2]

George Battle is one of the first "dreamers" we meet. In 1869 he settled on a farm in the Pastures and then sent for his mother, the first grotesque we find in the chapter. She is a grotesque of possession, one whose life is meaningless unless she can belong to a piece of property. For Mrs. Battle, her home was not merely a home, but an entire world. She felt "that space stopped ten miles from her village." She tries to come, but the tie to her home is stronger than her desire to please her son. On the trip to California, knowing that she can never return home, she dies "and a ship's watch buried her in a grey ocean with a piece of canvas for her coffin and three links of anchor chain sewn in between her feet; and she had wanted the crowded company of her home graveyard" (p. 4).

The death of his mother, however, does not discourage George in his attempt to create the Battle dynasty and he too becomes a grotesque of possession. He begins his search for "a good investment in a woman." Unfortunately "a good investment" as far as George is concerned, only means the amount of money a woman can provide. In his haste he finds Miss Myrtle Cameron, a spinster of thirty-five with a small fortune. Myrtle, despite her fortune, remained single because nobody wanted a woman with a "mild tendency to epilepsy, a disease then called 'fits' and generally ascribed to animosity on the part of the deity." Myrtle's sickness does not bother George because she has the two things he needs for his dynasty: wealth and the ability to bear him children. She does bear him a son, but then tries to burn his house. She is then confined to a sanitarium, and spends "the rest of her existence crocheting a symbolic life of Christ in cotton thread."

George needs a wife just so he can make his mark in the beautiful valley. He cares nothing for people but he does care about owning property. He believes that if he is to own land properly he must go through the properties of ownership. For George this simply means having a wife and family. He therefore takes Myrtle from Salinas and isolates her on the farm. Because Myrtle is not strong enough to face this isolation, she goes insane.

George continues to devote his entire life to his land and his dream of the dynasty. He has his son John, but John is part of Myrtle and since she is dead, he wants nothing by which to remember her. Although John could be used for the "dynasty," George believes that John is cursed. Thus, he pays no attention to John and devotes all of his efforts to his farm. At sixty-five he dies, leaving behind him one of

the most beautiful pieces of property in the Pastures, a neglected son, and an unrealized dream. John becomes the owner of the Battle farm and turns out to be even worse than his father expected. The same demons that killed his mother obsess him, "both the epilepsy and the mad knowledge of God." John believes that it is his life's duty to combat the infinite number of devils that live in the world. He does this not to benefit humanity but because he is convinced that all the devils are after his soul. Therefore, to protect himself he covers his clothes with white crosses and arms himself with a heavy stick. The farm comes to represent for him the locus of Satanic forces. At dusk he goes from bush to bush trying to beat out the "tempting" serpents. One day he beats on a bush until a snake comes out and bites him. John Battle, the religious grotesque, is happy when he is bitten because he realizes that although he will die, he will die with the satisfaction of knowing that he was right--lurking in the beauty <u>was</u> the evil serpent. Nevertheless this satisfaction corroborates his fanaticism. All his life was devoted to purifying his world. The fact that he can only be happy when he kills a snake shows that this obsession has distorted his mind.

The story of the Mustrovics is even stranger than that of the Battles. Ten years after the death of John, old Mr. Mustrovics, his wife, and his son buy the Battle property, the son works slavishly on the land and then the family inexplicably disappears. Physically, the old Mustrovics are ghostlike. Their skin is yellow, "stretched and shiny over their cheekbones" and they are as thin as skeletons. They speak to no one and are seen only on the farm. They cover the windows with flypaper to keep the air out, but other than this adornment they never take care of the house in any way. The son, however, works incessantly on the

land for two years and it again grows beautiful. One morning a neighbor discovers that the house has been deserted. The Mustrovics have left no trace.

Actually the lurid story of the Mustrovics serves to reemphasize the Battle story and subsequently the entire theme of the book. It is an emphasis by contrast. The Mustrovics, because they are so reticent and reclusive, express their feelings and desires to no one. They are not well-rounded people, but rather abstract action, as in the case of the son, or inaction, as in the case of the parents. They are truly grotesque in their appearance and in their isolation, but they are actually the only ones able to escape the irony that inundates the valley because they desire and need nothing. For this reason they cannot be disappointed. The son works feverishly on the land, but we never observe any sense of pride or need to fulfill a dream. On the contrary, it appears he is working just for work's sake. When he completes his task, the Mustrovics move on apparently satisfied, because we are never shown that they are dissatisfied. They are beyond disappointment because, unlike the novel's other major characters, they have not expressed belief in any illusions and their desertion proves that they need neither possession nor security.

Soon after the Mustrovics leave the Battle farm, Bert Munroe and his family buy it. The Munroe family is the most important family in the work because they function as the book's "norm." They appear in some capacity in all the chapters, except for the first and the last, and they function much as George Willard does in Winesburg, Ohio. There is, however, one basic difference between George and the Munroes. Winesburg, Ohio, as far as the George Willard segments are concerned, is a story of

initiation. George, like Sherwood Anderson, sympathizes with the various grotesques in the novel. However, at the beginning of the novel the lack of sympathy on the part of his fellow citizens toward these grotesques has no effect on him. Gradually, George learns just how parochial the townspeople are. As the aspiring artist-journalist, he learns that such parochialism will stifle his own development. Therefore he believes that it is necessary to transcend the "town norm" and in so doing he finds that he must leave Winesburg since he himself actually has become an outcast.

The progression of the Munroes throughout The Pastures of Heaven moves in the opposite direction of George's initiation. Bert and his family come to the Pastures because of their intense sense of frustration and isolation. Because they were the grotesques of their former community, they hope they can find a sense of belonging in their new home. This progression from isolation to acceptance is most pronounced with Bert Munroe, the head of the family. Initially, Bert comes to the Pastures to escape the failure of his life which he thinks is a result of some imagined disease.

> Bert Munroe came to the Pastures of Heaven because he was tired of battling with a force which invariably defeated him. He had engaged in many enterprises and every one had failed, not through any shortcomings on Bert's part, but through mishaps, which, if taken alone, were accidents. Bert saw all the accidents together and they seemed to him the acts of a fate malignant to his success. Bert was only fifty-five, but wanted to rest; he was half convinced that a curse rested upon him (p. 12).

At the end of Chapter One Bert begins the task of ingratiating himself with his neighbors. One of these neighbors informs Bert that after the Mustrovics and Battles inhabited what is now Bert's farm, the people of the community had a feeling that the place was haunted, or at least

possessed by an evil spirit. Upon hearing this Bert says:

> "I've been in a lot of businesses and every one turned out bad. When I came down here, I had a kind of an idea that I was under a curse." Suddenly he laughed delightedly at the thought that had come to him. "And what do I do? First thing out of the box, I buy a place that's supposed to be under a curse. Well, I just happened to think, maybe my curse and the farm's curse got to fighting and killed each other off. I'm dead certain they've gone anyway."
>
> The men laughed with him. T. B. Allen whacked his hand down on the counter. "That's a good one," he cried. "But here's a better one. Maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated and gone into a gopher hole like a pair of rattlesnakes. Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crawling around the Pastures the first thing we know" (p. 13).

Some critics believe that the neighbor's prediction is accurate because some action or word of the Munroe's determines the fate of various characters. Warren French believes that at least twelve people are either emotionally or physically harmed because of a Munroe. "It is precisely other people's 'feelings' to which the Munroes are insensitive; and, since they are callous, it never occurs to them that they could be wrong about something."[3] Peter Lisca concurs with French insofar as he sees the Munroes being responsible for the misfortune of others. Yet where French stresses the Munroes' insensitivity, Lisca calls the Munroe actions "satires of circumstance."[4] Lisca argues that the Munroes are merely inflicting this curse inadvertently upon others because the others just happen to be at the right place at the right time. Joseph Fontenrose, on the other hand, believes that the Munroes hurt people only in a superficial sense. In actuality the Munroe family is the panacea of the Pastures. They destroy others' illusions, make them face reality, and (whether consciously or unconsciously) prepare them to cope with a contemporary civilization in a realistic manner.[5]

In emphasizing the Munroes' effects upon the Pastures, French, Lisca and Fontenrose seem to be missing the novel's real emphasis. The Munroes are outcasts who come to the valley in quest of a home. In the course of the novel they establish themselves as respected citizens. In effect they become an integral part of the Pastures and are important because their story is the only story in the novel in which the main characters can cope with their environment. The Munroes are able to cope because Bert and his wife are realists. Besides Bert is also a skeptic. He comes to the valley merely to make an adequate home and hoping, not expecting, to escape his curse. Like the Mustrovics, he cannot be disappointed because he does not expect to fulfill any wishes. He cannot be destroyed like George Battle because he is not a dreamer.

The importance of the Munroe curse is not that it infects others, those in the Pastures who fail do so because they have already had a curse of their own. The Munroes are the grotesques that become part of the norm. If they have a direct relationship to others it is a relationship by contrast of this norm to the abnormal. We can find an example of this relationship in the story of Raymond Banks (Chapter Nine). Raymond has the most perfectly kept farm in the Pastures. Besides having a beautiful home and farm, Raymond himself is one of the most congenial men in the valley. "He said things, even the commonest of things as though they were funny. People laughed whenever he spoke. At Christmas parties in the schoolhouse, Raymond was invariably chosen as the Santa Clause because of his hearty voice, his red face and his love for children" (p. 120).

On the surface level Raymond appears to be a psychologically sound man. But Raymond Banks is actually as demented an individual as we will

find in the community, for while Raymond seems to be full of life and full of the love of life, he has a grotesque obsession with death. While his eccentricity is not obtrusive like that of John Battle, he is almost as fervent in his obsession with death as John is in his obsession with demons. We get an intimation of this true Raymond Banks in Steinbeck's physical description of him: "Thin, blond hair could not protect his scalp from reddening under the sun. Raymond's eyes were remarkable for, while his hair and eyebrows were pale yellow, the yellow that usually goes with light blue eyes, Raymond's eyes were black as soot" (p. 119). The unusual darkness in the midst of the lightness of his face and hair parallels the morbidity that lurks under the guise of a jovial personality. Raymond, the Santa Claus, the lover of children, is also a lover of death. This is shown in two ways, both of which approach ritual. Each Saturday morning Raymond kills roosters. A group of boys always gathers around him to watch him perform his act because for him, killing roosters is an art. His strokes of the axe are swift and precise, and he prides himself on his ability to kill painlessly. Raymond is jolly during these Saturday mornings and the vision of a laughing man, with admiring boys surrounding him as he methodically kills roosters, makes his grotesqueness seem more horrifying.

In addition to killing roosters Raymond has another pleasure involving death. A high school acquaintance had become a warden and two or three times a year Raymond recieves an invitation from his friend to come to witness an execution. For Raymond the experience is not merely enjoyable, but religious: "Raymond liked the excitement, the submerged hysterics of the other witnesses in the warden's office. The slow march of the condemned aroused his dramatic sense and moved him to a thrilling

emotion. The hanging itself was not the important part, it was the sharp, keen air of the whole proceeding that impressed him. It was like a super church, solemn and ceremonious and sombre. The whole thing made him feel a fullness of experience, a holy emotion that nothing else in his life approached" (p. 123). One day Raymond invites Bert, who is fascinated and yet confused by this merry man who seems to enjoy seeing convicts die. Bert's curiosity forces him to accept the invitation. However, he worries so frequently over the upcoming event that he tells Raymond the idea has sickened him. Raymond is infuriated but strangely enough he too decides to give up going to the execution.

Lisca sees Munroe, and not Banks, as the man with the sick mind. "It would be wrong to see Bert Munroe as the normal man who pricks the bubble of Raymond Banks' naive attitude, not only because Steinbeck consistently describes the Munroes as an 'evil cloud' but because all Steinbeck's work, especially The Red Pony denies this 'unhealthy' view that violence and pain are necessary."[6] Lisca claims that Bert's gruesome imaginings of bungled hangings are the locus of abnormality within the story and it is Munroe's imagination that ruins Raymond's "vacations." However, what Lisca seems to be ignoring is the fact that Raymond is not like one of the young boys who has fun in watching him kill roosters. Raymond, as Lisca observes, is not "naive." On the contrary, he is a very mature and complex individual able to get a religious satisfaction by going through the "service" that includes an execution. It is true that Steinbeck's writings do not look at "violence and pain" with approbation but this does not mean Raymond is justified in his pleasure because he abstains from connecting executions with violence and pain. Although Bert may not be a celebrator of life in the Steinbeck

sense (e.g., the sense that tells Steinbeck that all life is beautiful when men work together harmoniously), it must be remembered that it is Raymond, not Bert, who finds spiritual satisfaction when the celebration is that of death.

Tularecito (Chapter Four) is Steinbeck's first portrayal of the half-wit. He is one of Steinbeck's many characters (e.g., Lennie in Of Mice and Men, Johnny Bear in The Long Valley, Noah in The Grapes of Wrath, Pirate in Tortilla Flat) who are grotesque both physically and mentally. Because of this grotesqueness, Tularecito is an outcast, although as a paisano (the paisanos being descendants of the Spanish discoverers of the valley) he belongs to the Pastures. He is deemed paisano because Franklin Gomez, a paisano, discovered him in the wilderness while Tularecito was a baby. Gomez decided to raise the boy since he had no children of his own: "The baby had short, chubby arms, and long, loose-jointed legs. Its large head sat without interval of neck between deformedly broad shoulders. The baby's flat face together with its peculiar body, caused it automatically to be named Tularecito, Little Frog, although Franklin Gomez often called it Coyote, 'for,' he said, 'there is in this boy's face that ancient wisdom one finds in the face of a coyote'" (p. 97).

In speaking of characters like Tularecito, Johnny Bear, and Lennie Small, Edmund Wilson says, "Mr. Steinbeck almost always in his fiction is dealing either with the lower animals or with humans so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level."[7] In the case of Tularecito, the animal quality is even more pronounced because of the fact that he is a foundling. On the other hand, his uncertain background causes him to search for ancestors and security that far surpasses similar searches

conducted by the novel's more normal characters such as Molly Morgan, Bert Munroe, and Edward Wicks (Chapter Three). Wilson is accurate in placing Tularecito on the "animal level" but at the same time he seems to be underestimating just what this animal level is. Gomez calls the boy "Coyote" because of an "ancient wisdom." Ironically, it is this primitive knowledge that forces others to eventually place Tularecito in a sanitarium.

Tularecito's grotesque features and inability to communicate on an intelligent level estrange him from the people of the Pastures. However, his isolation does not affect him because his "ancient wisdom" has convinced him that he truly does belong to something. He needs to find this something, to possess it as well as have it possess him, so he develops a talent for drawing and carving objects. These objects become his sole possession and only means for happiness.

Although his pleasures are few, he is content with his life as long as he can be close to the land with his farming and planting, and is allowed to draw and carve as much as he pleases. However, the community again destroys happiness as "the concerted forces of the law gathered him in and put him in school." From that point on Tularecito is doomed as Lisca points out, "not because orientation is untenable in an absolute sense, but because of society's intrusion into the individual's adjustment."[8] Miss Martin, the teacher and representative of this society, discovers Tularecito's talents and has him draw upon the board. He is pleased to do so, but when she begins to erase his figures, he believes that she is destroying them. He is outraged and because of his inordinate strength he is able to wreck the entire schoolroom. Miss Martin immediately calls on Franklin Gomez and demands he punish his ward.

It is at this point where Miss Martin proves to be more grotesque than even Tularecito. Gomez takes a belt of rawhide from the wall. "Then, while Tularecito smiled blandly at Miss Martin, Franklin Gomez beat him severely across the back. Miss Martin's hand made involuntary motions of beating" (p. 40). Miss Martin's desire for revenge is so intense that Tularecito's pain becomes her almost orgasmic pleasure. The scene recalls Steinbeck's short story "The Snake," in that both Miss Martin and the woman act in a sexually grotesque manner. In the story a woman visits a biologist's laboratory and buys a rattle snake. The biologist puts it in a separate cage from the rest of the snakes and feeds it a rat upon her request. The serpent begins to approach the rat:

> The snake was close now. Its head lifted a few inches from the sand. The head weaved slowly back and forth, aiming, getting distance, aiming. Dr. Phillips glanced again at the woman. He turned sick. She was weaving too, not much, just a suggestion.
>
> The rat looked up and saw the snake. It dropped to four feet and backed up, and then--the stroke. It was impossible to see, simply a flash. The rat jarred as though under an invisible blow. The snake backed hurriedly into the corner from which it had come, and settled down, its tongue working constantly.
>
> "Perfect!" Dr. Phillips cried. "Right between the shoulder blades. The fangs must almost have reached the heart."
>
> The rat stood still, breathing like a little white bellows. Suddenly it leaped in the air and landed on its side. Its legs kicked spasmodically for a second and then it was dead.
>
> The woman relaxed, relaxed sleepily.[9]

There are many parallels between Miss Martin and the woman. The woman needs to own the snake completely. At one time she even reaches for it as if she were unaware of the danger. Miss Martin needs Tularecito because, like Gomez and Pancho, she is convinced that his creative gifts, in some manner, link him to a divine force. She considers the prestige that will come to her for discovering such an unusual talent. She tells

him repeatedly, "It is a great gift that God has given you." The woman makes her sense of ownership complete when she buys the rat and wants it fed to the snake instantly. Miss Martin also needs complete possession and when she finds she cannot control her Tularecito (also a reptile in that his name means "little frog"), she demands that Gomez hurt him. As Tularecito is being beaten he smiles at Miss Martin. As the snake is approaching the rat, the woman's motions also suggest a communication. Tularecito's expression indicates he is receiving pleasure from the beating. The snake receives pleasure in that his appetite is being satiated. Miss Martin is vicariously providing the pleasure with her "involuntary motions." The woman's motions consist of "weaving" and "relaxing." The first corresponds to the snake, the second to the rat who will satisfy the serpent and is now also at "rest." The woman possesses the snake and moves with it. Miss Martin demands that Tularecito be beaten and holds the imaginary long rawhide quirt in her hand.

As in the story of Tularecito, the Junius Maltby section (Chapter Six) shows how the norm of the community can upset all those of whom it does not approve. Junius is not half-witted or deformed but still he is abnormal in relation to the community. Junius is what we must call a grotesque of apathy. He has no goals, no dreams, and no illusions about himself or his future. He merely wants to spend all of his life doing nothing. In 1910 he comes to the valley and boards with the widow Mrs. Quaker. Junius is satisfied to live his life isolated in the widow's house but Mrs. Quaker has a great fear that the community is condemning her for living in the same house with a single man. Mrs. Quaker confronts Junius with her problem and Junius is obliged to solve it by marrying her. This does not really interfere with his plans since a

grotesque of apathy has no plans. Actually this connection provides him with money and property. With these two entities Junius can rot away his life without ever having to worry about supporting himself.

Mrs. Maltby tries to put Junius to work but Junius cares nothing about the farm. He is content to lie under a tree reading the romantic novels of Robert Louis Stevenson. As a result of Junius' laziness, the Maltbys grow so poor that their clothes are ragged and food is scarce. Junius, however, remains intransigent in his refusal to work. In 1917 Mrs. Maltby becomes pregnant and in the same year the wartime influenza epidemic strikes the community. The two events are symbolically related. Junius himself is a disease of the community. However, while he is restricted to his land he is, for the most part, innocuous. Yet, a Maltby child means that a Maltby will go to school, to town, and infect other children. Mrs. Maltby, in the midst of the epidemic, has triplets. The mother dies almost immediately after childbirth. The boys too are dying and Junius, instead of showing any great concern, goes from one boy to the next actually lecturing them on such subjects as the making of diamonds and the antiquity of the swastika. Junius is not callous to their dying but he is giving them the only thing he has, although he realizes that his knowledge has no medicinal powers. Two of his three sons die and "Junius went back to the stream and read a few pages of Travels With a Donkey."

Junius' apathy scandalizes the neighbors. They curse him violently but he refuses to let the people of the Pastures force him into a different kind of life. The community grows to hate Junius "with the loathing busy people have for lazy ones" but he is happy in his isolation. Junius hires Jakob Stutz, supposedly to help with the farm, but

actually he uses Stutz along with Junius' son Robbie (christened Robert Louis) to sit in the fields reading tales of ancient battles and faraway lands. Stutz is the first to be completely infected with the Maltby "disease," and thus he grows as content as Junius to do nothing, eat little, and grow progressively lazier. Geismar calls Maltby "a sort of Californian Bronson Alcott who creates a charming new Fruitlands idyll."[10] However, Alcott's experiment failed within a year because the participating intellectuals came there with expectations of being stimulated spiritually by a unique transcendental experience. Maltby's farm cannot fail because there are no goals that surround it. No one expects or obtains anything except the satisfaction of having nothing to do and having nothing demanded of him.

The Pastures' battle with Junius intensifies because the community has one inescapable need--to be needed. Junius can ignore the people and the land. Despite the fine quality of his property he "punishes" it with neglect: "Here in the fertile valley he lived in fearful poverty. While other families built small fortunes, bought Fords and radios, put in electricity and went twice a week to the moving pictures in Salinas or Monterey, Junius degenerated and became a ragged savage" (p. 72). Both men and women hate his idleness and complete lack of pride. At first people try to visit him and try to prove to him that his life is simply "unnatural." Junius receives them pleasantly but dispassionately. He does not scorn their advice, he just does not listen to it. Throughout the valley people consider him the eyesore of the community and his neighbors resolve to ostracize him from their society. But their resolution only serves to increase their hatred of the man. Junius does not

want their society. They realize this and know that they are losing the battle with the Maltby way of life.

The community believes it can reverse this losing trend when Robbie becomes of school age. A tattered boy in the midst of the prosperity of his school mates will force the son into changing the father. But the Maltby disease is potent and infectious, and the hope of winning the battle is foiled. At first the children look forward to tormenting the tramp, but like his father, Robbie needs no companionship other than what he receives on his farm. Thus, the children fail and their failure puzzles them. Their consternation forces curiosity because they are unable to understand why they cannot bother him. In an effort to discern the answer they try to learn as much as they can about his life. At this point Robbie begins to cast the Maltby spell over them as his father did to Jakob Stutz, and as Jakob looks to Junius, the children begin to look to Robbie as their leader. They even try to emulate his nonchalant manner and eventually desire to even dress like him. Robbie tells them of his father and completes the infection: "They listened intently and wished their fathers were gentle and lazy too" (p. 75).

The community is ultimately victorious because Robbie develops a characteristic not indigenous to the Maltby way of life. In short, Robbie grows proud since he realizes that his school mates are worshipping him. He is proud of his father, of his own dominance, and most important, of his ability to remain different from others. Robbie takes himself seriously and therefore he separates himself from the apathetic aura of Junius. When the schoolboard makes its annual visit to examine the children's progress, they come with another purpose and this purpose helps to destroy Robbie's sense of superiority. They resolve to do for

Robbie what his father refused--dress him respectably. Robbie receives a bundle of new clothes and he is horrified. "For a moment he looked about like a trapped animal, and then he bolted through the door, leaving the little heap of clothing behind him" (p. 85). The word "animal" is most significant here. Robbie's pride had its locus in his primitive way of life. He believed that since his peers idolized him because of his "difference," that every adult should respect him for the same reason. The "altruism" of the schoolboard, symbolized by the clothes, awakens him to the fact that those who are older and wiser consider him inferior. Robbie runs away to the hills and refuses to leave with his father for San Francisco. In the city his life will have to become "civilized." Junius has to actually trap him because "He's lived like an animal too long" (p. 87).

Thus, the community conquers Junius Maltby. Maltby had no goals or incentive but he did love his son. The bundle of clothes proves to him that he has been neglectful. Junius resolves to go to work in the big city and make up for his previous shortcomings. Like all the stories in this book the outcome is immersed in irony. Junius came to the Pastures with no dreams. He leaves with one that can never be realized. He came from the city, a place which only supplied him with poor health and he returns to it under the illusion that he will make his son and himself respectable and thus attain happiness. The people of the valley indirectly force him to leave since he will not conform. Ultimately, they are able to convince him that he is not happy because his son looks like a pauper. Junius believes this, the people rid themselves of the Maltby disease, and the community again moves a man to strive toward an unattainable goal.

Tortilla Flat

In the preface to Tortilla Flat Steinbeck tells the reader: "When you speak of Danny's house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow." It is quite obvious that Tortilla Flat concentrates on the "unit" of Danny and his friends, but it is also obvious that Danny's house is a unit within a larger unit, the larger unit being the entire section of Monterey called Tortilla Flat. Danny, Pablo, Pilon, and Big Joe Portagee are social outcasts, but so are Teresina Cortez, Tall Bob Smoke, Sweets Ramirez, and the Viejo Ravanno. Not only Danny and his immediate circle are society's grotesques, but every paisano who lives on the Flat automatically is isolated from middle class society simply because of the location of his home. In the preface Steinbeck characterizes the paisanos' backward way of life: "They live in old wooden houses set in weedy yards, and the pine trees from the forest are about the houses. The paisanos are clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them very vigorously."

Although the paisanos do not desire many belongings, Tortilla Flat possesses many examples of the "need-for-belonging motif." In The Pastures of Heaven we saw many individuals who could attain happiness only if they possessed something that was solely their own, or if they belonged to someone or something without any fear of being cast out. The same needs and desires permeate Tortilla Flat. Most of the episodes deal to some extent with an individual's relationship to something or someone he possesses.

The ownership motif begins with the novel's very first paragraph. Danny, just returning from the army, has learned that he has inherited two small houses from his "viejo." "When Danny heard about it he was a little weighed down with the responsibility of ownership" (p. 6). He is so overcome that, before even looking at his property, he gets drunk, starts rioting, breaks store windows, and is thrown in jail for a month. This actually sounds like anti-ownership and many critics believe that, for Danny and his friends, owning a home portends Danny's destruction and the group's ultimate disintegration. Fontenrose claims, "That income property may damage human relations is an important theme of Tortilla Flat."[11] French argues that the element of ownership makes the novel one of defeat rather than idealized romance. Ownership estranges Danny from the Flat and actually connects him with Monterey conventional society. At the end of the novel he destroys himself because he finally realizes what the burden of property has done to him.[12] Lisca goes as far as saying that Danny's circle has no respect for their property.[13]

But it must be disputed that the property in itself is something Danny and the paisanos can look upon with complete satisfaction. This is clearly exemplified when Danny comes across his old friend Pilon after getting out of jail:

> "You know the viejo's house on Tortilla Flat, Pilon?"
> "Here in Monterey?"
> "Yes, here in Tortilla Flat."
> "Are they any good, these houses?"
> Danny sank back, exhausted with emotion. "I do not know. I forgot I owned them."
>
> Pilon sat silent and absorbed. His face grew mournful. He threw a handful of pine needles on the fire, watched the flames climb frantically among them and die. For a long time he looked into Danny's face with deep anxiety, and then Pilon sighed noisily, and again he sighed. "Now it is over," he said

> sadly. "Now the great times are done. Thy friends will mourn, but nothing will come of the mourning."
>
> "Now what is over?" Danny demanded. "What do you mean?"
>
> "It is not the first time," Pilon went on. "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 are a man of property. Thou wilt forget thy friends who shared everything with thee, even their brandy" (p. 9).

Danny is forlorn because he has never had property and does not know how to handle the situation. As Pilon observes, Danny's newly acquired houses will inevitably separate him from this whole. With this in mind we can see that Fontenrose is right in assuming that it is "income property" which destroys the group-organism. However, the important word is <u>income</u>, not <u>property</u>. Danny, not being as astute as Pilon, decides that one way to keep him and his friends together is to rent them one house, while he lives in the other. But now Danny is no longer a friend, he is a landlord. The one-time unity between Danny and his friends (Pilon invites Pablo and Jesus Maria Corcoran to live with him) vanishes because Danny's old friends have become his new tenants. He soon discovers the barrier he has created and knows that there is little friendship when the obligation is material rather than spiritual. Therefore, when the rented hut is accidentally set afire and is in the process of being destroyed, Danny dismisses the matter without any signs of concern: "'Your other house is on fire, the one Pablo and Pilon live in.' For a moment Danny did not answer. Then he demanded, 'Is the fire department there?' 'Yes,' cried Jesus Maria. The whole sky was lighted up by now. The crackling of burning timbers could be heard. 'Well,' said Danny, 'If the fire department can't do anything about it, what does Pilon expect me to do?'" (p. 36)

Danny is not disheartened, he is relieved because he knows now what will inevitably happen. His friends will all move in with him and he will no longer be a landlord. Now he will again be a comrade. The property is no longer a cause for sadness but as the preface points out, Tortilla Flat "is the story of Danny and of Danny's friends, and of Danny's house. It is a story of how these three became one thing."

Tortilla Flat gives us three aspects of the group-organism or, as we see it in the novel, the collective grotesque. In summarizing the first two we can say that the group-organism is comprised of more than one individual who come together because of mutual love for each other and because they choose the society of each other rather than the society of the bourgeoisie. We can also conclude that each group-organism must have a unity of purpose, a common goal, if it is to stay together. This goal can range from raising enough money to buy a golden candlestick for a church (as in the case with Pirate and the paisanos), to helping the entire organism to survive (as we witness in The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle). There is a ramification of this latter aspect which related back to Steinbeck's transcendental and scientific theories in The Log From the Sea of Cortez. This is the part of Tortilla Flat which tells us that the group-organism is an absurdity unless it can continually perpetuate itself.

At first glance the idea of self-perpetuation may seem identical to unity of purpose and survival, but if we look at the character of Pilon we can see that self-perpetuation has wider implications. Although all who live in Danny's house feel great satisfaction in knowing that they are part of a group-organism their happiness, since they are primitives, is only on the instinctive level. Even Danny, whose emotions are violent

at the beginning and especially at the end of the novel, cannot begin to verbalize the rationale behind what he feels and does. Pilon is Steinbeck's first real embodiment of his ideals on self-perpetuation even though Joseph Wayne in To A God Unknown appeared three years earlier. Joseph, however, cannot be considered a positive figure because his concepts on unity go farther than mysticism and become fanatical. Pilon, on the other hand, has attitudes which are thoroughly healthy. He feels a great sense of pleasure in considering himself part of all natural things. When these things die, he realizes, as Steinbeck did in Sea of Cortez, that death of one part of his group-organism serves to facilitate life for a larger part of the organism.

Joseph Wayne, like Pilon, believes he is part of a larger natural body. In Joseph's case this body is a large valley. But when this valley is dying because of drought, Joseph feels that he too must die so that he can be faithful to his pledge of unity with nature. Joseph, unlike Pilon, does not realize that survival is the ultimate function of any unity between man and nature. Pilon feels a strong sense of unity between himself and Mrs. Morales' chickens. He is proud and happy when he can care for them and protect them from danger. Still he will kill a rooster because as part of the group-organism the rooster can satisfy the need of the larger part of the organism--it can satisfy the hunger of Danny and himself. The act is right for Pilon because it is not one of greed or viciousness but of mercy, altruism, and expediency. He is merciful because the rooster is weak and helpless. He is altruistic because he sees that the bird can feed others--not only himself. He is expedient because he sees an opportunity to fulfill his duty within the group--to find dinner.

Charles R. Metzger believes that Pilon's killing the bird and the basis for his action is just another example of the paisanos' many instances of rationalizing morally unacceptable deeds.[14] The rooster is scratching the pavement in the middle of the road when Pilon sees it.

> Pilon mused, "Poor little bare fowl. How cold it must be for you in the early morning, when the dew falls and the air grows cold with the dawn. The good God is always not so good to little beasts." And he thought, "Here you play in the street, little chicken. Some day an automobile will run over you; and if it kills you, that will be the best thing that can happen. It may only break your leg or your wing. Then all of your life you will drag along in misery. Life is too hard for you little bird" (p. 12).

Does Pilon really feel that he is doing the rooster a service by killing it or is Metzger right in assuming that Pilon is justifying his action to himself? The answer can be found in the paragraph preceding the one cited above. In this paragraph Steinbeck, as narrator, describes the rooster as "bare and naked." He also informs us that "Perhaps because he had been thinking of Mrs. Morales' hens in a charitable view, this little rooster engaged Pilon's sympathy." The bird does not merely gain his attention but his sympathy. The fact that killing the chicken also serves himself does not lessen the fact that Pilon is sincere and concerned. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by remembering that Steinbeck is as much realist as transcendentalist. He appreciates the beauty of unity but he also knows that unity is a nonentity unless there are survivors to be unified. Pilon understands this fully and thus does not need to rationalize the fact that he is killing part of the unit so another part can survive.

While Tortilla Flat presents Steinbeck's ideals concerning the collective grotesque, the novel shows no sustained group-purpose. Thus, Burton Rascoe is accurate in calling the book "gay, irresponsible,

charming,"[15] because after the paisanos help the lonely derelict Pirate to obtain the candlestick for the church of St. Francis, their chief concern is to enjoy themselves. As Watt observes, "The paisanos' altruism, charity, and loyalty are, in fact, usually as wedded to personal pleasure and interest as such values are in conventional society; though there is a greater proportion of gaiety, curiosity, and exuberant love of life in the paisanos' kind and friendly acts."[16]

The group-organism cannot survive on just "pleasure" and so at the end of the novel it disintegrates. The decline of Danny portends this disintegration. At first he is merely quieter than usual. Then he stays away from the house for long periods of time. During these periods he suffers from a complete loss of his group-sense. He steals from the entire Flat and eventually even from his own circle. In an attempt to reclaim Danny, his friends throw a tremendous party for him. Everyone in Tortilla Flat comes and the party appears to be fulfilling its intended effect. Danny is actually beginning to make himself a legend with the amount of wine he consumes and the number of women he seduces. But something goes wrong. He grabs a pine table leg and challenges everyone present to fight with him:

> "No one?" Danny cried again. "Am I alone in the world? Will no one fight with me?" The men shuddered before his terrible eyes, and watched, fascinated, the slashing path of the table leg through the air. And no one answered the challenge.
>
> Danny drew himself up. It is said that his head just missed touching the ceiling. "Then I will go out to The One who can fight. I will find The Enemy who is worthy of Danny!" He stalked to the door staggering a little as he went. The terrified people made a broad path for him. He bent to get out of the door. The people stood still and listened (p. 143).

Danny rushes into the forest, repeating his challenge, looking for his "opponent." The people hear a noise, run after it and find that Danny has fallen to his death from a forty foot ledge.

Although Danny does not have the cerebral powers to adequately express it, he knows that the group has become useless. It is true that each member is fulfilling his specific function within the group, but these functions lead to a complacent, carefree existence and ultimately the only responsibility of all the paisanos is to maintain an aimless form of existence. Something is telling Danny that the group-organism is dying because nothing can exist without consistent challenge. Danny does not suddenly become pugnacious because he is filled with wine. When he first started to brood, he did so because he needed a challenge or enemy. His need to destroy the enemy becomes a monomania and Danny, not having the mental capacity to face a psychological problem with intelligence, reverts to all that he knows--theft, violence, and ultimately death. As French explains, "Danny has set himself up against this opponent--his personal Moby Dick--and has been defeated."[17]

Steinbeck never tells us who or what this "Moby Dick" is. We only know it as "The Enemy" or "The Opponent." But each reader asks himself why is Danny troubled when his life is so free of care and adversity. Who could be an enemy to the easygoing, congenial Danny? Fontenrose claims that it is contemporary, conventional society. "This organismic complex--Danny, Danny's fellowship, Tortilla Flat, Monterey--is doomed to defeat before the forces of twentieth-century civilization. Monterey becomes just another American city, and Tortilla Flat fades away into it."[18] Geismar believes that Danny's remaining house has forced his deterioration, "Though there are apparently no taxes to pay on it, no

income from it, no repairs for the roof over his head and indeed very little roof to repair, Danny continues to feel the blight of its demand on his hitherto carefree life."[19] Carpenter interprets the enemy as being a kind of boredom, "the natural community fails finally through its own lack of purpose. To the values of nature must also be added the values of civilization. Where these 'heroes' dream only of tortillas on the flatland, the American dream includes the ideal of progress and a struggle to the heights."[20]

Danny must be destroyed because he can no longer live on a purely instinctive level, he has finally begun to intellectualize. As a matter of fact, in the last part of the novel Danny is closer to Steinbeck than even Pilon. Actually it is not "the forces of twentieth-century civilization" that conquer Tortilla Flat, as Fontenrose suggests. Danny is disgusted because these forces have left him behind. Carpenter is correct in assuming that the group is meaningless without a group-purpose. The paisanos laugh and live together. But none of this is enough. While it is true that Danny does not yearn for the materialism of Monterey, it is not the materialism that is his Enemy. The Opponent is the complacency of a sensory existence. Danny's house has become an adversary, not because he is a property owner, but because the house is a spawning ground for laziness and monotony. Danny is happy when he is able to help Pirate, the Spanish Corporal, and Signora Cortez, but when there is no trouble there is no responsibility. His friends are content with no responsibility, thus his friends are outcasts. But Danny needs a goal and he cannot live goal-free. Ironically, he becomes the outcast in the midst of a community of the dispossessed. After Danny's funeral

the paisanos go their separate ways. The unit dissolves because Danny, the new nucleus, found that the cell was without a function and he was without a home.

Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday

Ten years after the appearance of Tortilla Flat came the publication of Cannery Row (1945). In the interim Steinbeck wrote In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), The Grapes of Wrath (1939), The Long Valley (1941), The Log From the Sea of Cortez (1941), The Moon is Down (1942), and Bombs Away (1942). If we regard the subject matter of these works, we will see that it is quite different from that which we find in either Tortilla Flat or Cannery Row, both of which are similar in subject matter, theme and structure. Therefore it would seem as if Steinbeck was looking at his first success (Tortilla Flat) and trying to emulate it in Cannery Row. Certainly, on a superficial level the only differences between the two novels are the setting and the characters. The parallels between the two novels are so extensive that even the locales could probably be interchanged without hindering the overall effect of either work. Pointing to some of the parallels, we see that Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row are both slum areas of Monterey. Danny and his friends and Mack and the Palace Flophouse boys are group-organisms living in a single dwelling. Each of these groups isolates itself from modern society by its refusal to succumb to the materialistic standards that Monterey proper symbolizes. Each novel is extremely episodic, and the climax of both is a wild party. The respective groups are dedicated to one individual; the paisanos to Danny, the Palace Flophouse boys to Doc. There is a clear cut nucleus in each organism; Pilon of the paisanos and Mack of

the Flophouse. Finally, the communities of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row are the actual protagonists displaying the essence of social-symbiotic relationships.

Nevertheless, despite the many similarities between the two there is a radical difference in tone. Steinbeck no longer idealizes and idolizes the grotesque in Cannery Row as he did the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. While for the most part in Tortilla Flat Steinbeck treated the paisanos as roguish heroes, in Cannery Row he presents the main characters with compassion and at times even pity. But a more significant difference is that Monterey in Cannery Row becomes a character and provides the source of conflict that was so noticeably absent in Tortilla Flat. In his depiction of Monterey Steinbeck is bitter and even resentful. Watt is correct in assuming that in Cannery Row Steinbeck's indictment takes the form of satire, "At times a vicious satire, on contemporary American life with its commercialized values, its ruthless creed of property and status, and its relentlessly accelerating pace. In this world, the world which was soon to produce the beat generation, irresponsible bums like 'Mack and the boys' are the only gentlemen."[21] Douglas Heiney states Steinbeck is showing that "He stands at the opposite extreme from the Horatio Alger myth, for he admires everything that is not a material success: the have-nots, the misfits, the racial minorities unjustly deprived of their civil and economic rights, the simple, the poor, and the oppressed."[22]

At this point we must take Sweet Thursday into consideration. Sweet Thursday makes use of the same locale as Cannery Row and also maintains two of the earlier novels' major characters: Mack and Doc. The major difference is that Sweet Thursday avoids the episodic organization and

has a unified plot--that of trying to get Doc married. Still there is an important similarity that actually is so strong that it serves to make the two novels a thematic unit. This similarity is that both novels make the same philosophical assertions and social indictments.

In both Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday the communities of the norm are shown to be overly concerned with banal matters. For example, the citizens of Monterey are indignant when they find that immediately after Josh Billings dies in their town, a local doctor, after embalming the body, throws the "tripas" into a nearby gulch. In the same light, a nearby community (Pacific Grove) considers Rogue (a game resembling croquet) the most important part of its life. The town divides into two teams and the competition is so fierce that the members of the opposing teams are enemies even off the court. The man who introduced the game to the town sees what is happening and destroys the courts. The community, in response, runs Deems out of town "and every July 30 to this day, the whole town of Pacific Grove gets together and burns Deems in effigy." Steinbeck's condemnation of middle-class society is especially apparent in Sweet Thursday, in the chapter "Hooptedoodle (2)." Here we find an example of the materialistic greed of Pacific Grove as they take the annual migration of butterflies to their town, and exploit it--it brings tourists, and tourists bring money.

When one looks at these incidents it seems easy to agree with Alfred Kazin's statement, "People in Steinbeck's work, taken together, are often evil; a society moving on the principle of collective mass slowly poisons itself by corrupting its own members."[23] Monterey and Pacific Grove are even more collective as antagonists than Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row are as protagonists. Materialism, greed, and the

adherence to false values are all practiced under the name of community pride. Kazin's observations, however, seem to neglect the fact that the "collective mass" exemplifies corruption when Steinbeck compares it to the mass of derelicts. Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday are not novels about Monterey. Monterey and Pacific Grove become nefarious only when they are contrasted with the microcosm of the Western Biological Laboratory, the Bear Flag Restaurant, and the Palace Flophouse (which makes up Cannery Row). In essence the status quo is indicted because it is dealt with in the midst of the praising of grotesques.

While the collective attitudes of Monterey and Pacific Grove are ignoble, much of the beauty of the Row comes from the unified joy and unified sorrow of a type first witnessed in Tortilla Flat. In both Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday there is a kind of communal desire that exists in the Palace Flophouse, Lee Chong's grocery, and the Bear Flag Restaurant. The desire is best expressed by Mack in Cannery Row: "I been wondering for a long time what we could do for him--something nice. Something he'd like" (p. 26). "Him" refers to Doc, and the communal desire in both novels is to make Doc happy. To elicit this happiness there are three parties given in the course of the two novels, all of which are in Doc's honor. The first party is a miserable failure in which Doc's lab is almost completely destroyed. A "black gloom" settles over the entire Row. Each of the Row's individuals is so miserable that he either injures himself, becomes physically ill, or turns from a gregarious man to a miserable recluse.

Then Dora, the owner of the Bear Flag, tells Mack that he can rectify his mistake by giving another party. The communal feeling completely reverses itself because there is a new chance to please Doc.

In Sweet Thursday when the Row realizes that Doc is unhappy but can easily be made happy if they find him a wife, the entire community again grows euphoric. The title Sweet Thursday relates to the specific days on which this decision and subsequent euphoria occur. Whether the novel be Cannery Row or Sweet Thursday, when the Row feels this communal joy, we see this feeling in sharp contrast to the towns of Pacific Grove and Monterey. It is true that these towns also feel communal joy, but this feeling materializes when all individuals profit from something that happens to their city. The citizens of Cannery Row feel communal joy when they can contribute to making something good happen to a friend.

Although group-feeling is as important a part of Cannery Row as it is of Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck also deals with the individual's emotions in the former. In Tortilla Flat Steinbeck's naive romanticism leaves no room for psychological examinations of individuals. Although he approaches this with Danny's final battle, the psychological motivation is never clear. The question is, "Why does Steinbeck give the later novel this new emphasis?" In comparing the two novels Watt says, "To go back ten years, beyond the War, beyond The Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men, to Tortilla Flat, an earlier and equally popular 'flippancy,' is to realize how much more committed Steinbeck is to the Cannery Row world and its significance."[24] If we look at Steinbeck's personal history we can see that these ten years (1936-46) made his outlook pessimistic. After Tortilla Flat in 1936, Steinbeck worked alongside the lettuce-pickers in California and recorded the injustices he witnessed in a series of articles written for the San Francisco Chronicle, entitled "The Harvest Gypsies." In 1937 he traveled west with the migrant laborers from Oklahoma and published a nonfictional account in the pamphlet

"Their Blood Is Strong." In 1940 he took the trip with Ed Ricketts along the Sea of Cortez that proved to be the most profound influence on his philosophical ideas. In 1942 he was divorced and in 1943 he spent several months in the European war zone, returning disillusioned and disgusted.

Since Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck had experienced more of the world than what he found in the Salinas Valley. While remaining a yea-sayer, he now began to guard his optimism cautiously. His change in attitude is reflected in the darker tone of Cannery Row. Stanley Cooperman suggests that Steinbeck wrote Cannery Row as "an antidote to the war experience."[25] Yet, while the nostalgia and escapism are still quite apparent, Steinbeck's heroes are no longer mere hedonists. Group-organisms help to alleviate, but cannot eradicate personal, psychological difficulties. Thus, while the Row is a place for Steinbeck to escape from conventional standards, Mack and the boys, as Steinbeck's alter-egos, create the Palace Flophouse for more than just a sanctuary. In essence, it is a home for the psychologically grotesque.

Hazel's background provides a fine example of the history of these Flophouse grotesques. Hazel's mother names him before he is born because she expected a girl. When he arrives she is too tired from raising seven previous children to take the time to consider a proper name for a boy. Hazel spends four years in grammar school and four years in reform school. He finds no attention in his home or in either of the schools and as a result he becomes retarded. He grows up knowing only one thing --he desperately needs to hear conversation. In this sense he is much like Pirate in Tortilla Flat. Hazel however, unlike Pirate, will take

initiative after he is sure that he belongs to the group. He asks questions, not to hear answers, but to hear someone talking to him.

Gay's situation sounds like something out of a slapstick comedy and in this sense it is justifiable to call Gay a comic grotesque. Yet, like almost all the humor in Cannery Row, underneath the comic facade of Gay's story there is an incipient pain. Gay uses the Flophouse to escape from his wife. Whenever he speaks to her, the result is a verbal and physical battle. Gay is left with two alternatives--he can beat her unconscious or he can leave. Depending upon his mood, he makes his choice. If he chooses the latter, he finds two kinds of companionship. The first is that of other people at either the Palace Flophouse or in jail. The second is with machinery. Gay is described as being an "inspired mechanic." His inspiration comes from the knowledge that he has control over the "life" of something that is placed in his responsibility. Like Noah in The Grapes of Wrath who feels secure in his duty as family butcher, or Gitano in The Red Pony who finds an affinity with the old horse Easter, or Lennie in Of Mice and Men who is a self-appointed keeper of the puppies, Gay chooses to involve himself with something nonhuman because his major experiences with other people have been disastrous.

Unlike most of the Flophouse boys, Mack gives the appearance of being sure of himself and happy with his life. He is the undisputed leader of the Palace Flophouse, and he feels personally responsible for all the actions of the Flophouse boys. Frederick Bracher says of Mack, "His real strength, like Thoreau's, comes from renunciation. Mack's economy is as simple as that at Walden Pond; he knows what he wants, but he always considers whether or not its cost is excessive. He has no puritanical objection 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."[26] Bracher is correct in believing that Mack is able to reject wealth and what wealth can purchase, but Mack has a power of renunciation that goes beyond materialism; the renunciation of the self. Although Mack knows he is the boys' leader, he will never take personal credit for any success. Yet, he lets all of their failures rest upon his shoulders because Mack thinks of himself as a natural failure. After Doc's first party, Mack is only satisfied when Doc punches him in the mouth again and again. Although the frogs that the boys got for Doc were the real cause of the damage, Mack is convinced that the fiasco only further corroborates his idea that he can do nothing without it "turning sour." Mack's wife had left him because, as he tells Doc, even when he gave her a present something would always be wrong with it. So Mack forms the Flophouse to make up for previous errors and he tries to put joy into the entire community: "We don't do nothin' but clown no more. Try to make the boys laugh." When the communal feeling is anything short of happy, Mack is convinced he is responsible in some way. While Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday combine on one level to tell the story of Doc's change from isolation to happiness, on another level the story is of Mack's struggle with failure and ultimate ability to feel a personal success.

A number of grotesque characters in both Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday are not part of the major action, but nevertheless they play a significant role in contributing to the comic and serious tones of the novels. On the humorous side is old Mr. Roletti, a ninety-three year old man who has only one joy in life--chasing high school girls. He

eventually develops "senile satyriasis" and has to be forcibly restrained from his hobby. There are Mr. and Mrs. Malloy, who live in a boiler at the Hediondo Cannery. Mr. Malloy's greatest pleasure is renting out adjacent pipes to other Row derelicts. Mrs. Malloy is preoccupied with decorating her boiler-home with rugs, lamps with silk shades, and curtains in fine, middle-class fashion. Mary Talbot, the youngest female of the minor characters, has a mania for giving parties. She makes it her responsibility to have at least six birthdays a year and she always decorates her house for a party although there is no ostensible occasion. When she cannot find people to come, she invites all of the neighborhood cats. One of the most unusual grotesques of the Row is the "seer-philosopher" in Sweet Thursday, who is even more profound than Doc within that novel. However, in the midst of his wisdom he has an obtrusive incongruity--he loves to steal candy bars and insists he cannot enjoy a Baby Ruth or a Mounds unless he has stolen it.

Despite the comic nature of these characters, the dark side of their grotesqueness is far more pervasive. Even in the case of Mary Talbot, the underlying motif for giving parties is to make her husband Tom stop saying that the Talbot family is doomed. The cats function in the same way the Captain's bird dog does. Surrounded by gloom and loneliness, Mary talks cheerfully to Kitty Casini, whom she assumes is cheerful. Both Mary and the Captain (a caretaker of a private reservation) need animals to compensate for their lack of human companionship. Although the Captain is married, he lives entirely alone except for his dog. When Mack and the boys come to the land to look for frogs, he finally has human companionship. He tells Mack, "since my wife went into politics I'm pert running crazy. She got elected to the assembly for this

district and when the legislature isn't in session, she's off making speeches. And when she's home she's studying all the time and writing bills" (p. 55).

In a novel that almost entirely avoids the lurid, Cannery Row presents two characters that provide what grim atmosphere there is. The first, Horace Abbeville, has two wives and six children. Since he came to the Row he has built up a grocery debt at Lee Chong's that far surpasses the debts of anyone else. Horace only appears in the novel's first chapter but in that space we learn that he now has only one goal in life. He wants to pay his debt so his wife and children can live with dignity. The warehouse behind Lee Chong's (eventually to be turned into the Palace Flophouse) is his. He convinces Lee to take the warehouse and thus even the debt. Lee agrees, Horace goes across the lot into the building that was his and shoots himself. The second, William, is a pimp at the Bear Flag. He grows tired of female company and decides to visit with Mack and the boys. They welcome him but immediately become reticent. He leaves and their chatter resumes. William can only make out the sentence that Mack says: "But God damn it, I hate a pimp!" William feels completely rejected and convinces himself that he is going to commit suicide. He finds, however, that he is the only one that he can convince. William is convinced that no one will take the time or trouble to believe him. The last person he sees is the cook. The cook laughs at William but his laughter suddenly grows into fear when he sees the look in the depressed man's eyes. William has finally found someone to pay attention to him. He grabs an ice pick and cheerfully puts it through his heart.

The most pathetic character on the Row is a fatherless eleven-year-old, Frankie. Frankie's mother has little interest in him because she is preoccupied with all of his "uncles." Frankie's school does not want him because he is retarded. Thus he roams the Monterey streets until he finds the Western Biological Laboratory. He wants to work in the lab but lacks the mental capacity to do even the most menial jobs. "But Frankie was a nice, good, kind boy. He learned to light Doc's cigars and he wanted Doc to smoke all the time so he could light the cigars" (p. 36). When Doc has company Frankie, who loves to be around people, is elated. But although Frankie has a great capacity for love, this capacity does nothing to negate his irrationality. His overabundance of love, and the inability to temper it with common sense, make Frankie the novel's most pathetic grotesque. We can see how Frankie's psychological aberration works in both of the episodes concerning him. In the first episode Doc is about to have a party. Frankie hears that many people are going to be around him and he grows ecstatic. When the party finally takes place, two conflicting feelings confuse the boy. He knows he wants to do all he can to make the people happy but at the same time something working within his consciousness tells him Doc's people are too sacred for the likes of him. He tries to suppress the latter feeling by helping Doc serve refreshments, but he finds that the more people he sees, the more inferior he feels. Finally he resolves to face his demon:

> Now he was ready. He took a great breath and opened the door. The music and the talk roared around him. Frankie picked up the tray of beer and walked through the door. He went straight toward the same young woman who had thanked him before. And then, right in front of her, the thing happened, the coordination failed, the hands fumbled, the muscles panicked, the nerves telegraphed to a dead operator, the responses did not come back. Tray and beer collapsed forward into the young woman's lap. For a moment Frankie stood still. And then he turned and ran (p. 37).

When Frankie hears of the party Mack and the boys are planning for Doc, Frankie's emotions again destroy his self-control. He only knows that he cares for Doc and therefore must bring him a magnificent present. He reaches in his pocket, finds only seventy-five cents, and gets an immediate impulse to steal a fifty-dollar clock. After the police capture Frankie, Doc comes to bail him out, and then leaves him when he goes to explore for specimens in the caves at Point Lobo. Doc does not hear from the boy again.

Doc realizes that he is no longer able to do anything for Frankie and goes to seek in his work a refuge from his own sense of helplessness. As a scientist Doc knows that the boy is an example of nature's imperfections, and as a scientist he realizes that man is helpless in the face of these imperfections. As French observes, "It is misleading, even metaphorically, to view Doc as a kind of neighborhood god. He is better regarded as striving to be what Steinbeck respects as the best imperfect man can hope to be in an imperfect universe."[27] Being the imperfect man, and realizing his imperfections, Doc can escape the isolation of the ivory-tower scholar/scientist, and thus he can do what he enjoys most--communicate with other people. In this respect, Doc is Steinbeck's tribute to Ed Ricketts. As Joel W. Hedgpeth, a personal acquaintance of Ricketts, has pointed out, the most characteristic thing about Ed Ricketts was his love of conversation.[28] Whether the talk concerned such matters as esthetics, science, or sex, Ricketts was delighted as long as he could be a contributor. Webster Street, who knew both Steinbeck and Ricketts, describes the latter's method of discussion as that of "a mandarin" . . . "because he would sit and listen to what we were

saying and would nod his head and close his eyes--he seemed to agree with everything anybody said."[29]

Neither Doc nor Ricketts can really be considered social outcasts or grotesques since they are equally accepted by the conventional society of Monterey and the derelict society of Cannery Row. Nevertheless we must consider them (and in referring to one the statement will automatically apply to the other) because of two reasons. First of all, although Ricketts may not be grotesque, he has certain characteristics which he recognizes as idiosyncracies and which help him to tolerate the faults of others. For example, Steinbeck describes him as having a beard that made his face look like "half Christ and half satyr." He hated the idea of old age and because of an inordinate acuteness in the sense of smell he would not stay in the same room with old people since their odor annoyed him. He also hated thin-lipped women, hot soup, and getting his head wet. He despised a professor whom he referred to as "old jingle ballicks" (a man who appears as a pseudo-intellectual parasite in Sweet Thursday). He despised inhumane treatment of either man or animal. Seeing this kind of senseless cruelty would drive him to an almost uncontrollable violence to be inflicted on the perpetrator.

Ricketts' unusual traits and habits are actually enough material for a short novel (Steinbeck's article "About Ed Ricketts" was sixty-four pages). But Cannery Row, although dedicated to Ricketts, and although many of the things that happened to Doc also happened to Ricketts, is by no means a biographical sketch. But Doc's importance for the purposes of this discussion lies in the fact that, as Steinbeck's spokesman, only Doc can perceive the intrinsic beauty that resides in the grotesques of Cannery Row and all the grotesques who are deemed so

because of their refusal to conform to conventional society. This awareness is evidenced best in Chapters Eighteen and Twenty-Three of Cannery Row. In Chapter Eighteen Doc is collecting specimens in a tidal flat at La Jolla. Between two weeded rocks beneath the water, Doc discovers the face of a dead girl looking up at him. His arms become covered with goose pimples and he begins to hear the high pitched tones of a flute. Doc moves away and sits on a nearby precipice. He grows pensive and "his mouth smiled a little or seemed to catch its breath in ecstasy." Doc is not horrified at the sight. Rather, he actually takes a kind of scientific pleasure in being part of the scene. The serenity of the moment, the peacefulness of the girl's eyes suggests to him an apotheosis, not merely of the girl, but of the total surrounding. In the midst of his reflections a voice breaks in asking him if he has been fishing. Doc explains to the man what he has seen. The man's only response is that there will be a sizable bounty. Doc is appalled that materialism even spreads to such spiritual moments as this. He leaves in anger, telling the man that he can claim the bounty.

Chapter Twenty-Three occurs right after the failure of the first party. The Palace Flophouse and its residents have become a picture of gloom and despair. From his laboratory Doc can see Mack and the boys suffering with sorrow. Again he reaches a spiritual satisfaction, not because they are paying for what they did to his property, but because they exemplify the grandeur of human emotion. He is drinking beer with a friend and tells him that Mack and the boys are the world's "true philosophers." The friend cannot understand this and replies, "I think they're just like anyone else. They just haven't money." Doc realizes that his companion is myopic and thus it seems as if he addresses his

next speech not to his listener, but to the reader, and it is in this speech that we find the novel's thesis:

> "It has always seemed strange to me," said Doc, "The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meannness, egotism, and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second" (p. 88).

The derelicts epitomize "the quality of the first," as do the paisanos in Tortilla Flat. But although the Row and the Flat do have prototypes, speaking on a geographical basis, Steinbeck makes these areas seem like "never-never lands." Steinbeck could only escape from the reality of "the produce of the second" for so long, and then he had to wake up and confront the fact that he was as middle-class as the Monterey citizens. In being so, he had to leave the land of the dream slums and assume the responsibilities that accompanied his position as writer, husband, and father. In the same light, at the end of Sweet Thursday Doc, who was the solidarity of purpose for the derelicts, leaves to accept a position at a university. However, Doc does not leave alone. He has found Suzy and will make her his bride. But he is not merely changing his marital status--he is in effect changing his whole concept of the group-organism. He, like Steinbeck, has come to view the family unit as the most important unit in America.

From 1932 to 1945 we see an evolution in Steinbeck's attitude toward the community. In The Pastures of Heaven Steinbeck seems to be implying that the community is harmful to the individual. Tularecito, Raymond Banks, Junius Maltby, and his son are all hurt because they do not conform to the Pastures' standards. In 1936, in Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck's attitudes toward the grotesque and its relationship to the

conventional community has changed. Steinbeck is now presenting individuals who can live outside of conventional society and still live happily. The grotesque characters in The Pastures of Heaven were all miserable because they discovered that their values were unacceptable to more normal people. In Tortilla Flat, the paisanos create their own society as well as their own standards; standards revolving around the concept of harmonious living among all community members. In the same novel Steinbeck points out that harmony is not enough. The group-organism needs a group-purpose and in Cannery Row we find that no matter how trivial a group-purpose is, while it exists the grotesque community, the group-organism, will continue to function.

FOOTNOTES

[1]F. W. Watt, John Steinbeck (New York, Grove Press Inc., 1962), p. 36.

[2]Frederic I. Carpenter, "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer," The Southwest Review, July 1941, rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 72.

[3]Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 42-43.

[4]Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p. 62.

[5]Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1963), pp. 22-25.

[6]Lisca, p. 63.

[7]Edmund Wilson, Classics and Commercials (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1950), p. 36.

[8]Lisca, p. 66.

[9]John Steinbeck, "The Snake," North American Review, June 1935, rpt. in The Long Valley, 1938, republished by (New York: Bantam Press, 1964), p. 55.

[10]Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), p. 243.

[11]Fontenrose, p. 33.

[12]French, p. 57.

[13]Lisca, p. 84.

[14]Charles R. Metzger, "Steinbeck's Mexican Americans," in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1971), p. 145.

[15]Burton Rascoe, "John Steinbeck," The English Journal, 1957, rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 57.

[16]Watt, p. 80.

[17]French, p. 59.

[18]Fontenrose, p. 34.

[19]Geismar, p. 255.

[20]Carpenter, p. 75.

[21]Watt, p. 79.

[22]Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature (Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series Inc., 1958), p. 227.

[23]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 396.

[24]Watt, p. 79.

[25]Stanley Cooperman, The Major Works of John Steinbeck (New York: Monarch Press, 1964), p. 12.

[26]Frederick Bracher, "John Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," published in The Pacific Spectator, 1948, E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., p. 193.

[27]French, p. 60.

[28]Joel W. Hedgpeth, "Philosophy on Cannery Row," in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 102-03.

[29]Webster Street, "John Steinbeck: A Reminiscence," in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 36-37.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFRONTATION

Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday all present two societies antithetical to one another: the conventional Monterey and the derelict Flat and Row. These conflicts and contrasts, no matter how explicit, are ideological in nature. Different values engender total separation between the communities. In these novels the derelict communities of Danny and the paisanos and Mack and the Palace Flophouse Boys are the communities that stand for Steinbeck's ideal of the group-organism. The society of Monterey approaches communal unity only in the suggestion of degradation among all of its members. There are also two opposing types of people in the novels In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath. However, in each of these novels the two opposing groups are in direct confrontation with each other. The success of one invariably means the failure of the opposing group.

In Dubious Battle

The first time that Steinbeck dealt with the confrontation between two opposing ideologies was in 1934, when he wrote the short story "The Raid." In this story we are able to see the germ of In Dubious Battle (the novel that was to appear less than a year later). "The Raid" consists of three brief scenes. Dick and Root are communist "committee" members who are assigned to conduct a meeting of prospective

sympathizers. The first scene takes place as the two are walking to the deserted building where the meeting is to be held. Root is new at this type of work and his fear annoys the more experienced Dick. They go inside the building and wait for their audience to arrive. The hours pass but still no one comes. Root is afraid that the word of their secret meeting has leaked out. Dick, however, reproves him by saying that sooner or later that type of thing is bound to happen. Eventually a vigilante apprehends them and beats them mercilessly. The final scene is in a prison hospital where the two awake with broken arms, noses, and ribs.

More than a short story "The Raid" is a psychological study of martyrdom to the communist cause. This short piece concentrates on the manner in which the two men accept their fate. On their way to the meeting Dick explains to Root that neither of them is important unless his actions can strengthen the overall movement. Root is able to comprehend this notion but the fear of being beaten forces him to question the rationale. He wonders how the destruction of committee members can actually help the committee. Dick answers that being beaten brings the Cause notoriety. Root is willing to accept this but he fears that at the moment of confrontation the concern for his own safety will force him to forsake his loyalty to the Cause, and he will flee. Dick immediately reprimands him:

> "No, by God! It's against orders. If anything happens we got to stick. You're just a kid. I guess you'd run if I let you!"
>
> Root blustered: "You think you're hell on wheels just because you been out a few times. You'd think you was a hundred to hear you talk."
>
> "I'm dry behind the ears anyway," said Dick.

> Root walked with his head down. He said softly, "Dick, are you sure you wouldn't run? Are you sure you could just stand there and take it?"
>
> "Of course I'm sure. I've done it before. It's the orders ain't it? Why, it's good publicity" (p. 64).

After waiting for nearly an hour, a fellow committee member approaches them and informs them that a vigilante is coming. Dick is now happy because he knows that in staying and accepting the beating he and Root will be fulfilling their part of the group-purpose. Root is now frightened to the point of panic, but Dick soothes him: "Take hold kid! You take hold! And listen to me; if someone hurts you, it isn't him that's doing it, it's the System. And it isn't you he's beating. He's taking a crack at the Principle" (p. 49).

In the story the confrontation between "System" and "Principle" is of secondary importance. The two opposing concepts are significant here because they point toward In Dubious Battle where Steinbeck develops them more fully in the form of the Torgas Valley Growers' Association and the strikers. The theme of the story is that when devotion to the group suppresses individuality, the result is the "group-monster" rather than the group-organism. Within this framework of interpretation, Dick's reaction to the beating is more grotesque than the beating itself. As he is being repeatedly pounded with two-by-fours, he first sardonically smiles and then giggles hysterically. In the hospital, Root appears to have been initiated into Dick's cult of self-sacrifice: "It didn't hurt, Dick. It was funny. I felt all full up and good . . . when they was busting me I wanted to tell them I didn't care" (p. 72).

Although Steinbeck by no means treats the vigilante committee and growers' organization in "The Raid" and In Dubious Battle sympathetically,

he does not direct the major thrust of his anger at these groups. Gloria Stolk seems to be missing the point of the novel when she sees the vigilante and growers' association as society's "insatiable Moloch" feeding upon the poor.[1] While this view of oppression is true in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck's attack in In Dubious Battle is directed at the communist party itself. As French observes, "He views the subordination of the individual to a cause as an affront to human dignity, because he perceives that, since a 'cause' is an abstraction after all what one seeks in its name is only what one wants for one's self."[2] The title, In Dubious Battle, comes from Paradise Lost and in comparing the two works Fontenrose says that the Party is to the novel what Satan is to the epic poem.[3] The Party truly does go after the souls of individuals, tempting them with promises of a better future life. The Party members completely ignore the present and work for the progeny of their followers, rather than the followers themselves. Geismar believes that the Party "sacrifices the workers to their own faith, just as fanatic and mystic in the communist cause. . . . The average man (the London, Anderson, Al, Dakin) of the novel, caught between these two extremes, suffers and makes his fellows suffer for no purpose of their own."[4] But still these "average men" are far from being innocent victims. It is true that the powerful associations try to suppress them, but at the same time they are easy prey for the Party because these strikers are as materialistic as the opposition. Hence, a clever Party member can sway them if he just explains that a little sacrifice will automatically engender much personal gain. Unlike the Joad family in The Grapes of Wrath, who merge with a larger (and to Steinbeck better) group, when they share the experience of death with the Wilson family, the strikers,

although they need the same kind of unconscious unity of migration, never seem capable of cohering in the same way. Lincoln R. Gibbs perceives the reasons behind this inability when he says of the strikers, "Most of them are coarse; a few are cowards and turncoats; some are shortsighted and self-indulgent. In the mass they are subjected to inconstant gusts of emotion--now furiously valiant, now whimpering with discomfort and fear."[5]

The Party's job is to take this multifarious collection of misfits and illiterates and turn them into a homogeneous structure united by a need for revenge and by a hatred of the big land owners. If the Party is to succeed it must turn the self-centeredness of each of the strikers into a self-denial that will enhance the prosperity of the entire group. As the Party members force the strikers to lose their individuality, these same strikers also seem to lose much of their humanity. When Andre Gide referred to In Dubious Battle as "the best (psychological) portrayal that I know of Communism,"[6] he was referring to the transformation of the human mind of the strikers, to the animal-like group-mind of the herd. After Party members have completed their transforming, each striker cares only about the success of the strike.

Joy is the perfect example of a Party grotesque, e.g., an individual who has no concern for his own well-being as long as he helps the Cause to succeed. The Party has manipulated him so thoroughly that he can do little except think of ideas, and reiterate clichés that relate to the movement. When Mac (the leader of the Party members) introduces Jim (his new apprentice) to Joy, he tells him:

> "Joy is a veteran, aren't you Joy?"
>
> "Damn right," said Joy. His eyes flared up, then almost instantly the light went out of them again. His head twitched

> several times. He opened his mouth to speak, but he only repeated, "Damn Right" very solemnly, as though it finished off an argument. He caressed one hand with the other. Jim saw that they were crushed and scarred.
>
> Mac explained, "Joy won't shake hands with anybody. Bones are all broken. It hurts Joy to shake hands."
>
> The light flared in Joy's eyes again. "Why is it?" he cried shrilly. "'Cause I've been beat, that's why! I been handcuffed to a bar and beat over the head. I been stepped on by horses." He shouted, "I been beat to hell, ain't I Mac?"
>
> "That's right, Joy."
>
> "And did I ever crawl, Mac! Didn't I keep on calling 'em sons-of-bitches till they knocked me cold?" (p. 15)

Joy is what Dick and Root of "The Raid" will ultimately become. Compared to Joy, both Dick and Root are neophytes in violence. While capitalism beat their bodies, their minds are manipulated by communism. The Party appreciates Joy's devotion so, through Mac and some of the other members, it will patronize him. It will tell him that he is "one hell of a fighter" and a respected "veteran." This praise is the only happiness he will ever know and with each kind word he will repeat the manifesto "And who takes the profits? The people with the invested capital. But they don't produce nothing. What right they got to the profits?" By repeating this catechism Joy again proves to himself that he is a veteran of the Cause.

While Mac will condescend to humor Joy, he knows that Joy has just about outlived his usefulness. He explains to Jim that in Joy's last confrontation, the police broke his jaw with a night-stick. In the prison cell the doctor would not treat him because he was a "God-damn red," and as a result Joy's mind has been "screwy ever since." Jim feels sorry for Joy but Mac believes that Joy's inherent stupidity has caused his many battle scars. "Well, Joy just never learned to keep his mouth

shut." The Party progresses because of a blending of devotion and intelligence--not mere fervor and complete willingness to serve. Yet Joy still has more to offer the Cause. He starts a rally and when the police interfere, he stabs one of them. He breaks jail and when the strikers confront the "scabs" Joy appears from within the midst of the strike-breakers exhorting them to give up their purpose. He is shot by a guard and falls dead in between the opposing lines. "Jim clung shivering to Mac's arm. Mac turned and muttered, 'He'd be so glad. Look at the cops, Jim. Let go my arm. Don't lose your nerve. Look at the cops'" (p. 148).

Joy's only purpose in life was to serve the Party and thus Mac is right in assuming that Joy would be happy to know that his death served the Cause. Mac's first reaction is to use Joy's death to anger his followers. He moves toward the dead body and says to Jim, "Look at the cops, they're scared to death. We've got to take him [Joy] I tell you. We've got to use him to steep our group-eye, to keep 'em together. This'll stick 'em together. This'll make 'em fight" (p. 149). The truth is, however, that whether or not Joy, or any individual, would want to sacrifice himself to the Party, Mac, and eventually Jim, believes that all sacrifice, and all immoral actions are justified as long as there is the slightest hope for a resulting future victory for the Party. It is because of this attitude that we see both Mac and Jim as grotesques of cruelty. Joseph Fontenrose seems to misinterpret their character when he says that the major conflict of the novel is the conflict between the dual nature of each of their personalities (e.g., the battle between their individuality and their devotion to the Party).[7] This dualism, if it does exist is by no means "central" to understanding their motives.

They are both grotesque monomaniacs in their need to devote themselves to the Party and, if they ever question the necessity of brutality and sacrifice, it is a short-lived moment that only teaches them more about their roles as henchmen for the Cause. Some of their deeds may antagonize the little humanity left in them, but they never regret what they have done. Instead, they are quick to express that they will repeat the same deeds if the Cause ever demands it.

Mac has no compunctions about injuries or deaths which may occur during his campaign to organize the laborers because he subordinates personal feelings to the Party's needs. We have already seen his reaction to Joy's death, but a more shocking example of his cruelty occurs when Jim (who is ostensibly his friend) is killed by a vigilante. Rather than regarding it as a personal tragedy, Mac sees Jim's death as an opportunity to promote discontent among the laborers. This promotional opportunity makes him positively elated. "His hands gripped the rail. His eyes were wide and white. In front he could see the massed men, eyes shining in the lamplight. Behind the front row, the men were lumped and dark. Mac shivered. It moved his jaws to speak and seemed to break the frozen jaws loose. His voice was high and monotonous. 'This guy didn't want nothing for himself' he began. His knuckles were white, where he grasped the rail. 'Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself'" (p. 313). The strikers are scared, and even worse, have been disillusioned with the Cause. Mac desperately needs something to reunite them and Jim's death comes at the opportune moment. The fact that Jim had been so close to Mac makes Mac happier because it will reemphasize the unselfishness of the true Party member. As the news of Jim's death

spreads, the men come together. Mac witnesses this regrouping and exemplifies his quintessential grotesqueness by considering Jim's dead body to be a beautiful sight.

Since Mac is able to view the death of his friend dispassionately, he is obviously perfectly capable of looking at his men as if they are animals. Consequently, he is not entirely disturbed when the group's food supply runs low. After all, he reasons, a hungry animal is more prone to violence: "They're wild. They're hungry again. Boiled meat and beans tonight. I knew they'd get cocky on that meat. They'd like to go out and burn houses right now" (p. 232). If there is no immediate target for group violence, the cruel and inordinately clever leader is never at a loss to find other outlets. When a young boy is caught spying on the strikers, Mac latches upon the opportunity to excite his men with the sight of blood:

> "I want a billboard," said Mac, "not a corpse. All right kid. I guess you're for it." The boy tried to retreat. He bent down, trying to cower. Mac took him firmly by the shoulder. His right fist worked in quick, short hammer-blows, one after another. The nose cracked flat, the other eye closed, and the dark bruises formed on the cheeks. The boy jerked about wildly to escape the short, precise strokes. Suddenly the torture stopped. "Untie him," Mac said. He wiped his bloody fist on the boy's leather jacket. "It didn't hurt much," he said. "You'll show up pretty in high school. Now shut up your bawling. Tell the kids in town what's waitin' for 'em" (p. 247).

The beating that Mac inflicts upon the boy is more horrifying than that which Dick and Root received at the hands of the vigilante. The raiders in the short story were angry. Their anger was a result of patriotism. Their motive was to keep their country pure--to punish the "reds" for trying to infiltrate it. Mac feels nothing in beating the boy. He is not angry but actually pleased that he has found another

chance to help the Cause. Beating the boy serves a dual purpose. He can reingratiate himself with the strikers (who are annoyed by the lack of progress under his leadership) by revenge inflicted, and he can use the boy's battered body as a symbol to promote group-unity.

While Mac may be devoted to the Cause, there is a trait of his personality that suggests he is actually quite self-centered. Although Mac is perfectly willing to sacrifice the lives of others, he is not willing to skip a meal. Mac seems to be even more cruel when we consider him in this light. There are many instances throughout the novel when Mac shows himself hypocritical as well as callous. For example, when the strikers elect Dakin, a fellow-worker, one of the section leaders, Mac says to Jim, "You know, I think we made a mistake about putting Dakin in. He's too tied up with his truck, his tent, and his kids" (p. 160). Dakin cares about himself: a Party sin. Yet four pages earlier, right after Joy's death, Mac's first thought is about supper. Later, when he sends Sam, one of the striker's militants, on a mission to burn a leading citizen's house, Mac immediately realizes, "Hell, we never did get anything to eat." When London says that he hopes Sam does not get caught, Mac enters the room with a can of food and says cheerily, "Jesus, I'm hungry. I didn't know it till I got the first bite." After a newspaper editorial condemns the strikers, Mac immediately thinks of eating beef and beans. After the police inform Mac that some of the men were shot, his first reaction is "I'm hungry. I'm going to eat my beans."

While Mac is grotesque because of his cold-heartedness, Jim is actually grotesque because of his fanaticism. Mac always has every situation under control because he is level headed, but Jim's fanaticism, like that of Joy's, turns his devotion to the Party into pure monomania

and like Joy, Jim is ultimately destroyed because of his irrational devotion. Although Jim is not a half-wit like Pirate (Tortilla Flat) or Tularecito (The Pastures of Heaven), he suffers from the same sense of complete isolation at the beginning of the novel. While Pirate and Tularecito need companionship, Jim needs a specific direction for his energy. Jim approaches Party headquarters because he met some Party members while he was in jail on a vagrancy charge. He explains to the secretary, "In the jail there were some Party men. They talked to me. Everything's been a mess all my life. Their lives weren't messes. They were working toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again" (p. 7). When he meets Mac for the first time, he explains that his cell-mates were completely happy because of their security within a political movement: "I'd never known any hope or peacefulness, and I was hungry for it. I probably knew more about so-called radical movements than any of those men. I'd read more, but they had the thing I wanted, and they'd got it by working" (p. 21). Although Jim may be familiar with Party philosophy, Mac knows that Jim is not a radical. No matter how fervently Jim tries to convince Mac that he sympathizes with the Cause, Mac realizes that Jim has not found a group-purpose in conventional society and this is why the boy turns to the Party. Yet, Mac also realizes that Jim has the potential to become a devout member. He has no political affiliations but he is a careful observer of all affiliations. He has no vices because vice for the sake of itself has never provided him with pleasure (he eventually takes up smoking because it ingratiates him with the strikers). He has nothing to do and nowhere to go, but when the Party will provide him with direction, his mixture of brains and desire will make him the most industrious of workers.

When Mac accepts Jim as his protege, a radical change in Jim from curious observer to fanatic Marxist begins. At first, the master-neophyte association parallels the relationship of Dick and Root in "The Raid." Jim is in awe of Mac, full of questions, occasionally bothered with doubt, and occasionally with fear. If we recall the end of the short story, it suggests that Root is becoming as loyal as Dick. In the novel, Jim not only equals Mac's devotion but actually surpasses it. Mac always maintains control over his own emotions, knowing that if he cannot control himself, he cannot manipulate others. But Mac is a veteran. He has been an important part of the Cause for a long time. Jim takes one taste of this security and his powers of objective observation change to insanity. He is not content to witness how Mac works. Instead, he believes he must be an essential part of all action. When Doctor Burton suggests that the movement is "brutal and meaningless," Jim replies, "It has to go on. It can only stop when the men rule themselves and get the profits of their labor" (p. 229). Jim's reply is accurate Party ideology but like Joy's clichés, this response has become the only thing he knows. He lives to inculcate the Party's doctrine and receives pleasure merely by hearing himself regurgitating the manifesto.

When Jim cannot talk of his loyalty, he must show it by his actions, and the most dramatic way to act is with violence. As Mac begins to show signs of tiring, Jim takes the strategical leadership and proves that he is as capable as Mac at sending his men off to sacrifice themselves:

> "All right tomorrow morning we're going to smack those scabs. I want you to pick the best fighters. Give the men clubs. I want two cars to go together, always in pairs. The cops'll probably patrol the roads, and put up barricades, let the first car knock 'em off the road, and the second pick up the

> men from the wreck and go on through. Understand? Anything we start goes through. If we don't succeed, we're farther back than when we started" (p. 252).

A cursory glance at this passage suggests that Jim's militant leadership is the same as Mac's. However, there is a fundamental difference. Unlike Mac who is satisfied with sending others into the breach, Jim insists on being part of the battering ram. Even Mac becomes frightened of his companion as we see when he notices that while Jim delivers his speech his eyes "jump" in a frantic manner. "You're getting beyond me, Jim. I'm getting scared of you. I've seen men like you before. I'm scared of 'em. Jesus, Jim, I can see you changing every day. I know you're right. Cold thought to fight madness, I know all that. God Almighty, Jim, it's not human" (p. 249). Mac is absolutely right. Jim has lost his grip on sanity and has cheerfully become a monster, desiring nothing except the bloodshed that symbolizes the Cause in action.

This desire is realized as he is injured twice within the course of the novel. The first injury comes as a result of an early confrontation with the townspeople. Jim receives a flesh wound on the arm and it is his proudest moment. Like Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming, Jim thinks he has a "red badge." But unlike Henry, Jim does not consider courage an issue because he knows that nobody doubted his willingness to fight. Jim's wound, however, is a symbol which he can use to prove that he is worthy to be a Party member. He flaunts his wound not only to reprimand others for lack of commitment, but also to inspire others with the sight of blood. When the strikers threaten to disband, Jim actually wants to gather the men, pull off his bandage and "stir 'em up" with the flow of blood. Mac feels that this would be superfluous and ironically he is

right. Jim's second injury soon occurs and half his face is blown off by a vigilante's shotgun.

Like most of Steinbeck's novels, In Dubious Battle has one character who observes the action from what we have called the nonteleological point of view. In this novel it is Dr. Burton. He visits the striker's camp, not because he is a Party sympathizer, but because he has a scientific and nonideological sense of compassion for those who suffer. The strikers need him to maintain governmental rules on sanitation. Mac is aware that Dr. Burton is not a sympathizer and constrained as Mac is within his own ideology, he cannot comprehend why the doctor is helping the strikers. Burton tries to explain:

> "I don't know. I guess I just believe they're men, and not animals. 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 are always that way.' No, you'd try to clean them up and feed them. I guess that's the way it is with me. I have some skill in helping men, and when I see some who need help, I just do it. I don't think about it much. If a painter saw a piece of canvas, and he had colors, well, he'd want to paint on it. He wouldn't figure why he wanted to" (p. 177).

Steinbeck is using Dr. Burton to reveal the unreality of ideological categories. While grotesques like Mac and Jim live within the narrow rooms of their group labels, Dr. Burton can see the flesh and blood individuals who compose the groups. Burton believes that any label is dangerous if a man lets the ideology behind this label rule his life. He studies the confrontation between the strikers and the land owners and he is not able to view the battle as one between the strikers and the system. "Strikers" and "system" are meaningless words.

Although Dr. Burton is the scientific observer, he is more than just a detached scientist. T. K. Whipple sees the doctor as one "who sees little difference between men and microbes."[8] Lisca claims that Burton's function is merely to serve as an "objective chorus."[9] Yet, both Whipple and Lisca are missing the most important characteristic of Burton. It is true that the doctor desires to view men in terms of an objective whole. But it is also true that his experience in contemporary society has shown him that men will never concur with him. It is here that Steinbeck makes his most evident condemnation of an entire society, for Dr. Burton, the most intelligent and humanitarian character of In Dubious Battle is the novel's only outcast: he is left standing alone committing himself to men who "belong" because they can commit themselves to a label. Dr. Burton wants to be more than a government supervisor, but at the same time he cannot sacrifice his beliefs. If he is lonely he at least knows himself. As part of a cause he can only know his function.

Dr. Burton functions as Steinbeck's spokesman, but also his sense of isolation parallels that of Steinbeck. We have already witnessed how Steinbeck often considered himself completely evil, a belief which forced him to make himself a recluse. But Dr. Burton shows us the opposite side of Steinbeck's motivations for self-imposed isolation. Steinbeck is the nonteleological observer upon whom all of his nonteleological observers are ultimately based. Yet, his refusal to champion one side or the other in the novel In Dubious Battle drew condemnation from both sides of the confrontation, and the author became an enemy of a large part of his society. Still, he remained steadfast in his nonteleological philosophy. Unfortunately, both the strikers and the owners considered Steinbeck to be a supporter of their opposition. Steinbeck's neutrality, intended for

the purpose of treating everyone fairly, ironically caused everyone to misunderstand him.

The Grapes of Wrath

Steinbeck's pamphlet "Their Blood Is Strong" was published in 1938, a year before the appearance of The Grapes of Wrath. The pamphlet was a result of Steinbeck's observations while living and traveling with the migrant laborers from Oklahoma to California. "Their Blood Is Strong" is especially important because in this pamphlet Steinbeck discusses the social ideas found in The Grapes of Wrath discursively, whereas in the novel, he takes a more literary and subjective approach. The pamphlet contains a statement similar to an idea expressed almost thirty years later in Steinbeck's America and Americans: "This hatred of the stranger occurs in the whole range of human history, from the most punitive village farm to our own highly organized industrial farming" (p. 54).[10] In both "Their Blood Is Strong" and America and Americans Steinbeck does not express this sentiment to accuse and condemn, but to point to an unfortunate fact--man, according to Steinbeck, can rarely accept those different from himself, whether it be in terms of race, religion, or economic class. Steinbeck shows the migrant laborers in "Their Blood Is Strong" to be perennial outcasts because they have no home of their own. They are only "accepted" when they are needed to work someone else's land: "As one little boy in a squatter's camp said, 'When they need us they call us migrants, and when we've picked their crop, we're bums and we got to get out'" (pp. 57-58).

The living conditions of the migrants are grotesque because without roots the migrants cannot establish a decent home and since these people

rarely have any money, when they do stay in one spot for any great length of time, they cannot afford the essentials necessary for a decent home environment. Steinbeck describes a typical migrant home: "They have one quilt and a piece of canvas for bedding. The sleeping arrangement is clever. Mother and father lie down together and two children lie between them. Then, heading the other way, the other two children lie, the Littler ones. If the mother and father sleep with their legs spread wide, there is room for the legs of the children" (pp. 60-61).

Members of the migrant families often are physically grotesque because of their poverty. There is the three-year-old child whose stomach is swollen because of malnutrition. "He sits on the ground in the sun in front of the house, and the little black fruit flies buzz in circles and land on his closed eyes and crawl up his nose until he weakly brushes them away" (p. 62). Three years before, Steinbeck portrayed the same kind of grotesque living conditions in the home of Teresina Cortez (Tortilla Flat). There, the poverty was naively presented as a symbol of the refusal to succumb to conventional society. The tone was carefree and hedonistic. In "Their Blood Is Strong," on the other hand, one cannot help get the feeling that the author is gritting his teeth in keeping his temper. By the time we reach The Grapes of Wrath, we see that the author can no longer restrain himself.

In "Their Blood Is Strong" and The Grapes of Wrath the people described are not given the chance to achieve their potential. The landowners and farmers' groups feel that the advancing, or actually the uniting of small farmers and migrant laborers, will inevitably mean the destruction of large farm monopoly. "Indeed, such organizations as Associated Farmers, Inc. have as members and board members officials of

banks, publishers of newspapers, and politicians; and through close association with the state Chamber of Commerce they have interlocking associations with shopowners' associations, public utilities corporations and transportation companies" (p. 65). When Mac looks at his competition in the Torgas Valley and observes "This place is organized like Italy," he is expressing the sense of hopelessness and futility of every ambitious migrant. As James P. Degnan observes, the direction of land development in California was to form, "not as a democratic system of homesteads, of family farms, but as an autocratic system of plantations, a system dominated by a handful of land monopolists determined to hold the land, determined to keep the small farmer from owning land."[11] And, of course, this "group-purpose" of the large associations had a more vital implication. Without roots, land, or any possessions, a man cannot have what Steinbeck deems "dignity." Steinbeck defines the term "dignity" as "a register of a man's responsibility to the community. A man herded about, surrounded by armed guards, starved and forced to live in filth loses his dignity; that is, he loses his valid position in regard to society" (p. 70). When man loses his dignity, when he is suppressed to the point where he has no reason for pride, he also loses his desire to resist suppression, and then the large conglomerates can easily rule.

In Dubious Battle showed that Steinbeck was angry with the impersonal group. In The Grapes of Wrath he was trying to show individual land owners that their own enemy was the mass to which they belonged, not the poor laborers that this mass was trying to cheat. This is exemplified by the fact that the passages most closely resembling naturalism are those which describe the relationship of the large growers' associations to the individual employees, subservient to the associations. A

technique that the naturalists, such as Zola, Crane, London, and Garland, commonly used was to show the insignificance of the individual by not giving that individual a name. Steinbeck utilizes this technique when he speaks of these employees. They are nameless "things" unable to act without the approval of the larger "things." When the owners confront the squatters, the futility of the situation is set forth:

> And the owner men explained the workings and the thinkings of the monster that was stronger than they were. A man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that.
>
> Yes, he can do that until his crops fail one day and he has to borrow money from the bank.
>
> But--you see, a bank or a company can't do that, because those creatures don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing but it is so. It is just so (p. 27).

The farmer begs the owner for just another few months. The owner is neither willing nor unwilling. He is a creature without a volition. It is the Monster Bank that is unwilling and so the farmer has no one to whom he can direct his plea. The Monster Bank of the West is so powerful that it can even control smaller associations. A farmer wants to pay his men thirty cents an hour. He is a member of the Farmer's Association, in which all members feel their men are worth the thirty cents. But the Bank says the wage must be cut to twenty-five. There is no sense objecting because the Bank has set <u>the</u> wage at twenty-five. The Monster's appetite cannot be satisfied while giving thirty cents an hour.

Steinbeck exemplifies this abstract, impersonal, crushing Monster in the image of the bulldozer which clears the land for the large scale farms that are replacing the small holdings of the "Okies." This beast is as frightening as it is powerful because as part of an invisible

power, nothing can stop it, at least nothing except an unreachable organization. The bulldozer is powerful enough to destroy, but it is not powerful enough to change its direction. The source for this kind of power comes from the organization. Yet, the little man who drives the machine has no way to contact this source.

> The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man, gloved, goggled, rubber duck mask over his nose and mouth, he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat. The thunder of the cylinders sounded through the country, became one with the air and the earth, so that earth and air muttered in sympathetic vibration. The driver could not control it--straight across country it went, cutting through a dozen farms and straight back. A twitch at the controls could swerve the cat' but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractors, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him--goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, muzzled his protest (p. 30).

Neither the driver nor the migrants can see the Monster. Yet, in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck states that if the migrants form a beast of their own, a beast in which all laborers come together to develop a communal fortitude, they can destroy the mechanical Monster. Where the Monster can crush individuals, it cannot crush the spirit of an entire people. Steinbeck's demonstration of this idea occurs when he shows the Monster destroying one small farm after another. Each farmer is scared, but scared because he is directionless. Then, all the farmers realize that they have the same enemy and the attitude begins to change:

> And then suddenly the machines pushed them out and they swarmed on the highways. The movements changed them; the highways, the camps along the road, the fear of hunger and the hunger itself; changed them. The children without dinner changed them, the endless moving changed them. They were migrants. And the hostility changed them, welded them, united them--hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shot guns, guarding the world against their own people (p. 251).

In other words, Steinbeck is saying that there is no adversity too great if it is met by a group-organism. This is not the perverse kind of group-organism like that of In Dubious Battle. In Steinbeck's ideal group-organism, each cell is an equal member concerned with the welfare of the entire group, and in feeling this way consequently is concerned with himself: "Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if the men were whole." But being whole is more than just being one with the larger group because even the group cannot survive unless there are definite roots. As one of the tenants explains, "Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he's bigger because he owns it" (p. 31).

When a man is no longer a part of his land and when he has no group to which he belongs, he faces what Steinbeck calls "ostracism." This ostracism in some way accounts for all of the novel's grotesques. The keeper of the junkyard whom Tom and Al meet in Chapter Sixteen is a perfect example of the effects ostracism can have on the individual. "A specter of a man came through the dark shed. Thin, dirty, oily skin tight against stringy muscles. One eye was gone, and the raw, uncovered socket squirmed with eye muscles when his good eye moved. His jeans and shirt were thick and shiny with old grease, and his hands cracked and lined and cut. His heavy, pouting, underlip hung out sullenly" (p. 157). The one-eyed man displays the effects of ostracism in two ways. His physical appearance forces him to believe that he is repulsive to all

who see him. Thus, he stays in the isolation of the junkyard alone at night, where it is unlikely that he will be seen.

More important than being isolated from society, the one-eyed man is actually alienated from himself. He is afraid of personal failure so he uses his handicap as an excuse for rotting his life away in the stagnant environment of the junkyard. He is so obsessed with his own ugliness that he convinces himself he must resign to a life of misery and loneliness when actually, as Tom tells him, his chance is equal to that of anyone else: "Now look-a-here, fella. You got that eye wide open. An' ya dirty, ya stink. Ya jus' askin' for it. Ya like it. Let ya feel sorry for yourself" (p. 159). His self-pity is especially annoying when we contrast him to Jule Vitela, a young migrant whom Tom meets while staying at the government camp. Because Jule is a mixture of two societies, white and Indian, and a full-blooded member of neither, both races ostracize him. He wants desperately to find a place in any society, but none will have him. Since he is a migrant, the powerful whites reject him, and since he is half-white, the Indian nation rejects him. He wishes that he was a full-blooded Indian so he could have the privileges of owning reservation land, but he realizes that wishing is just a waste of time. Unlike the one-eyed man, Jule is handicapped because of his birth, but also, unlike the one-eyed man, Jule will always struggle, fight, and search until he finds a place where he can belong.

The "ragged man" and the old Mayor of Hooverville are grotesques created by another kind of ostracism. While the one-eyed man is a physical grotesque whose grotesqueness forces him to estrange himself from the rest of civilization, the "ragged man" and the Mayor are mental grotesques in that the Monster has ostracized them from their ability to

think rationally. They are not like Tularecito (The Pastures of Heaven) or Lennie Small (Of Mice and Men) who were both born half-witted; they are more like Joy who, in the course of fighting for a cause, has been beaten into imbecility. The "ragged man" is a combination of cold, blank stares, uncontrollable giggling, and repetitive warnings. He has been to California, having gone with the illusion that he could find prosperity. All he found was poverty, but for an entire year he refused to abandon his dream. The Monster tolerates no dreams, and so instead of prosperity, the man was rewarded with the death of his wife and two children from sickness and starvation. When the Joads meet him, he has returned to the nameless camp on the side of the road to lurk in the darkness and repeat his admonitions to every traveler who stops long enough to listen.

The Mayor of Hooverville is described by those who know him as "bull-simple." Steinbeck never makes his background clear, yet we suspect that he would never submit to being riled and pushed by town authorities. As a result of this recalcitrance he has been beaten repeatedly. He has given up his search for a home of his own and has come to be the mainstay of a transient camp. He greets every newcomer as if he were camp owner and as each family leaves, he asks if anyone will leave anything behind for his use. This greeting and begging are his only activities. When the authorities threaten to destroy Hooverville, he again refuses to leave because he does not have the initiative left to search for a new place.

Although Muley Graves is not as demented as either the "ragged man" or the Mayor, we still see him as a mental grotesque because of his refusal to leave his barren land. Again the case of Muley is one in which

the Monster ostracizes the individual from a peaceful home life. When the bulldozers destroy Muley's land, his wife and children go to California in search of a new home. Yet despite his love for his family, Muley cannot bring himself to leave. Muley explains to Tom, "Somepin jus' wouldn' let me." Muley will still not leave the land when the Joads invite him to accompany them on their journey. All he can say is, "If ya come on any of my folks in California, tell 'em I'm well."

While there is little doubt that Muley is mentally abnormal, there is a suggestion that this abnormality is due to Muley's extraordinary sense of belonging to the land. Harry Thornton Moore implies this when he states that Muley is similar to old Gitano in The Red Pony.[12] Both Muley and Gitano maintain that the land on which they were born and raised is the land on which they should rightfully die. But at the same time Muley never seems to have the spiritual awareness that Gitano exhibits. Gitano returns to the Tiflin ranch because he realizes that this piece of land is actually part of himself. Muley, on the other hand, does not fully understand what is keeping him from leaving the deserted countryside. The only reason that he can articulate is that the land has been part of his past; he first had sexual intercourse on the land, and he saw his father gored to death by a bull on the land. There is also the "Somepin" that seems to hold him and perhaps this something is the beginning of the kind of spiritual awareness we see in Gitano.

In the case of Grampa and Granma Joad, the ostracism from the land does not seem to strike us in a tragic sense as in the cases of the "ragged man," the Mayor, and Muley. This is because the grotesqueness of the latter is a mental grotesqueness, while that of Grampa and Granma seems to be of a comic nature. As a matter of fact, those readers who

objected to the "tasteless" humor in The Grapes of Wrath usually pointed to Grampa and Granma Joad for proof of their criticism. It is true that a good deal of the gross, and even scatological qualities of the novel are associated with Grampa and Granma. For the most part, however, the "indecency" gives the novel a kind of comic relief as a few of the events surrounding the two are clearly slapstick in nature. Granma's temper forced her to shoot off one of her husband's buttocks. Whenever Granma feels good she can be heard yelling, "Pu-raise God for vittory." When we first meet Grampa he is buttoning his fly. When the task proves to be difficult he abandons it and fumbles with his underwear buttons instead. Whenever Grampa gets angry he wets his pants. Often he can be found "foolin' with his fly" and at one point he reaches inside of his pants and "contentedly scratched under the testicles."

Yet there is another side to Grampa and Granma Joad that suggests they are more than just comic grotesques. Like Gitano (The Red Pony) they have long ago reached the point where they have become part of their land. Thus, when they leave the farm they too are undergoing the process of ostracism--they are tearing themselves from their roots. Neither of them can rationally articulate their feelings concerning the departure, so they express themselves in an elementary fashion. Grampa begins to cry as they are about to leave and Granma refuses to get in the truck until she has one more chance to relieve herself in the bushes. The two grow less cantankerous as the journey progresses but they have, in fact, left a vital part of themselves behind, a part without which survival is impossible. While on their own land they were full of energy and vigor. No matter what California may represent for them, it is a world in which their life would have no meaning. Steinbeck suggests this when he shows

that almost immediately after leaving his land Grampa dies of a heart attack in the tent of a roadside camp. Soon after, Granma begins to chatter senselessly in the truck and also eventually dies.

Much of the adverse criticism directed at Steinbeck, in general, and The Grapes of Wrath in particular, has focused upon his supposed inability to create well-developed characters. Kazin says that Steinbeck uses the Joads as "symbolic marionettes."[13] According to Geismar, around the Joads "Steinbeck weaves his fantasies, so that the Joads emerge as idealized in their own way as those smooth personages who dwell everlastingly in the pages of the Saturday Evening Post."[14] Walter Allen believes that all the characters are "too simply conceived, much too close to the popular stereotype of poor-whites and hillbillies to be found in comic strips and cartoons."[15] We must concede that Grampa and Granma Joad could be called "stereotypes" as Allen has described. One can readily imagine seeing both of them within the frames of Al Capp. But as far as the rest of the Joads are concerned, the label "stereotype" is misplaced. It seems that not only would they be out of place in the "comic strip," but also in the "white trash" novels of Erskine Caldwell. In Caldwell's novels there are stock characters because these are stock situations, e.g., seduction, robberies and murders. All that is needed are promiscuous daughters such as Darling Jill in God's Little Acre, illiterate mountaineers like Ty Walden in the same novel, and clumsy share-croppers such as Jeeter Lester in Tobacco Road. However, The Grapes of Wrath is not a stock situation. The plight of the Joads is an attempt to obtain human dignity. While the Joads may not have the intellectual capacity of Hemingway's Jake Barnes or Lawrence's Paul Morel,

it is the intensity of their struggle, and the different ways in which Steinbeck manifests this intensity that makes the Joads memorable.

There are two ways we can view the Joads and their plight. First, we can look at them as one out of many families of migrant laborers fighting a battle of survival against the Monster. The interplay between the Joad chapters and the interstitial chapters suggests Steinbeck wants us to look at the Joad family as representatives of all oppressed, migrant families. However, a second way of looking at the Joads all but negates the first view. While we cannot deny that the Joads are part of a large group-organism (e.g., the migrants), neither can we deny that the Joad family is an organism in itself. The social complexities that Steinbeck presents in portraying the larger migrant movement is quite different from the psychological complexities we find in the Joads as individual characters apart from that movement. While on the social level of the novel the Joads symbolize the migrant of the interstitial chapter, there is no parallel found between the grotesque aspects of some of the Joad members and the nameless figures of the chapters not directly concerning them.

The most obvious grotesque in the Joad family is the oldest son Noah, who is both physically and mentally distorted. Kazin argues that Noah is merely another one of "Steinbeck's hobgoblins,"[16] in that he resembles so many of Steinbeck's beast-men. When we first meet Noah, we would tend to agree with Kazin's remark, because Steinbeck does describe him as less than normal:

> Noah the first born tall and strange, walking always with a wondering look on his face, calm and puzzled. He had never been angry in his life. He looked in wonder at angry people, wonder and uneasiness, as normal people look at the insane. Noah moved slowly, spoke seldom, and then so slowly that people

> who did not know him thought him stupid. He was not stupid, but he was strange. He had little pride, no sexual urges . . . Noah left the impression of being misshapen (p. 68).

Noah appears grotesque in the eyes of others because of his strange appearance. But actually the fact that he can find no common ground for communication with others is the primary cause for people considering him abnormal. Within the farm and migrant communities people often talk to each other about their goals and desires. Noah's desires are latent and therefore he does not know enough about them to discuss them with anyone. However, although Noah appears in only the first fourth of the novel, he goes through a process of initiation in which he grows from being ignorant of any goal to the point where he realizes his life's purpose.

While Noah's dream is in its incipient stage, he completely devotes himself to the family unit. He stoically and silently accepts the problems that surround his family, and people interpret this silence as imbecility. Nevertheless, Noah is always impervious to the opinions of others and therefore he merely continues to perform his function within the family unit (Noah is a butcher of sorts, preparing the meat so it will not spoil on the trip). Eventually, as the trip progresses Noah comes to realize that something is more important to him than the family unit. When the family is about to leave the roadside camp, Noah wants to stay there, in the wilderness, where he can have his own place in the world, where he can "Get myself a piece of line. I'll catch fish. Fella can't starve beside a nice river" (p. 185). This is all Noah says concerning his goal, but when it comes time for the family to leave, he is intransigent in his decision to remain and find this place. While Noah's dream and subsequent decision may be unrealistic, we must remember that

Noah is feeble-minded and therefore, being realistic is beside the point. What is most important is the fact that Noah has matured from being completely passive to becoming aware of the basic desire in each human being--that of wanting to belong to something, and having something belong to him.

While Noah, as well as all the Joads, exhibits a growing spiritual awareness, another element also places them above the realm of mere stereotype. The element is that of guilt, and in looking at the entire family one can see that guilt is actually a significant motif in the novel. Ma feels guilt because she did not give Granma a proper funeral. Yet the strength of Ma is such that her sense of practicality forces her to dismiss mistakes of the past and plan for the future. Rosasharn's guilt is mostly implanted by the fanatic Mrs. Sandry of Weedpatch. Rosasharn becomes convinced that she herself is the embodiment of sin. At times her guilt causes self-pity. Often she whimpers and cries, and eventually she breaks into near-hysteria. Only Ma can control her and actually browbeat her into regaining her senses. Al actually goes through an initiation by guilt. Like Tex, in The Log From the Sea of Cortez, Al feels a tie with something mechanical. In the case of Al it is the engine of a car, "Al at the wheel, his face purposeful, his whole body listening to the car, his restless eyes jumping from the road to the instrument panel. Al was one with his engine, every nerve listening for weaknesses, for the thumps or squeak, hums and chattering that indicate a change that may cause a breakdown. He had become the soul of the car" (p. 107). Whenever anything goes wrong with the car Al is blamed. His standard reply is, "But it wasn't my fault." Of course Al knows that in being the mechanic, he is responsible for the machine.

When he is blamed he grows defensive, angry, and then sulks. Yet Al's initiation is not into responsibility for an automobile, he is well aware of this as the journey begins. What Al finally does realize is that he is not the mechanic of the car, but of the group-unit. When his family places the blame upon his shoulders, it causes injury to his pride. Ultimately however, he realizes that his failure hinders the function of the whole.

With Pa and Uncle John the feelings of guilt become so severe that these characters actually become grotesques of guilt. In the case of Pa, his guilt complex exists because of his part in making Noah abnormal. Although people suspect that Noah is strange and look at him as if he is a freak, only Pa knows the reason for Noah's abnormality, and it is Pa who is tortured by the way others look at his first-born:

> Pa thought he knew why Noah was strange, but Pa was ashamed and never told. For on the night when Noah was born, Pa, frightened at the spreading thighs, alone in the house, and horrified at the screaming wretch his wife had become, went mad with apprehension. Using his hands, his strong fingers for forceps he had pulled and twisted the baby. The midwife, arriving late, had found the baby's head pulled out of shape, its neck stretched, its body warped; and she had pushed the head back and molded the baby with her hands. But Pa always remembered and was ashamed (p. 68).

When Noah decides to stay by the river, Pa's first reaction is one of intense anger. However, he immediately changes his tone as he seems to feel as though he realizes that his carelessness is the cause of Noah's strange decision. Pa re-envisions the horrible birth scene with every anomalous action Noah commits.

While Pa's sense of guilt is strong, it is mercifully sporadic. He has not actually forgiven himself but he has been able to live with himself because he has a guiding hand in Ma who comforts him in times of

his greatest anguish. Uncle John is not so fortunate. With Uncle John guilt is a veritable monomania and the story of this grotesque of guilt is actually one of the most completely developed in the novel. Uncle John's guilt feelings stem from the fact that he dismissed his wife's complaint of a burning stomach, as a common pain. The result was a ruptured appendix and subsequent death. She begged him to get a doctor but he told her, "Hell, you jus' et too much." Uncle John goes through life in an almost somnambulistic state thinking "I kil't her, I kil't her." Because of his guilt, he isolates himself from other people. He does what is expected of him within the family unit, but once he accomplishes his chore he retires into his stupor. He comes out of his reclusiveness only to go on wild drunks and fits of debauchery: "It was told of him one time that once he went clear to Shawnee and hired three whores in one bed, and snorted and rutted on the unresponsive bodies for an hour, but when one of his appetites was sated, he was sad and ashamed and lonely again" (p. 84).

In the midst of the trip Uncle John feels the need to get drunk. Although money is scarce it appears to the rest of the family that if John is not allowed the opportunity he will go insane. As Ma puts it, "I never seen a man so drove." When Tom finds Uncle John in a gully drunk to the point of semi-consciousness, Uncle John finally expresses the one wish that has been on his mind since the death of his wife, "Wanta die so bad. Wanta die awful." Even after his intoxication wears off he is still obsessed with more of a sense of sin. Steinbeck's re-emphasizes Uncle John's grotesque sense of guilt when he shows that Uncle John believes the terrible hangover is just punishment for his senseless and self-centered act committed the night before.

Near the end of the novel, Uncle John goes through a sudden metamorphosis. He has come to the point where he is totally unaware of the problems surrounding his family. The Joads are on the verge of starvation and Tom has to abandon them for fear of being captured. None of this, however, means anything to Uncle John. When Pa asks for his advice he can only respond with, "Don' seem like I'm hardly awake no more." Then something happens. Rosasharn's time comes to have her baby. The birth is extremely painful for the girl and she screams. Her physical suffering is paralleled with the mental torment Uncle John is experiencing as he hears her screams. In an attempt to maintain his equanimity, Uncle John frantically piles mud on the artificial dam. Whenever Rosasharn screams, Uncle John hears the cries of his wife. Then the baby is born, the screaming subsides, and Uncle John regains his senses. The trauma of the episode actually becomes his cure. Here we find an example of the grotesque mind's logic. Uncle John pities the child and mother when the baby dies, and because of his pity he seems to forget his own guilt. Yet, it is not that Uncle John no longer feels guilty, but that he sees the opportunity for a propitiatory sacrifice. Thus, he requests the task of burying the baby. Instead, however, he puts it in a basket and floats it down the rising river. This act suggests that Uncle John is finally sympathizing with the Joads' problems; he wants society to see its indifference toward the oppressed, and he believes the baby symbolizes this indifference. Yet, Uncle John's act implies that he is still suffering from guilt. The dead baby is a kind of surrogate for his dead wife. In the case of the latter he was useless. By making "use" of the child he believes he can make up for his past.

While Ma Joad is the most important character, and Tom Joad is the central character, Jim Casy is the most thematically significant figure in the novel. Actually we can find a basis for Steinbeck's transcendentalism in the philosophy of the ex-preacher who is the most important of all Steinbeck's transcendentalist grotesques. Even the philosophical assertions found in The Log From the Sea of Cortez seem to take a back seat to Casy's ideas. The portrayal of the life of Jim Casy was a prerequisite for the expedition, for in Jim Casy, Steinbeck seemed to find the perfect group-man; one that could see himself as part of all other men and all other things, and yet also see himself as subservient to no one but himself. When Steinbeck took his trip along the California coast, a year after the publication of The Grapes of Wrath, he was able to witness the practical application of Casy's ideas in marine-organisms.

Casy is a grotesque in two ways. First of all, he is isolated, or more accurately, isolates himself from society in order to attain his ideas. In this respect he is like many other Steinbeck profound thinkers, also grotesque because of their self-imposed isolation: the seer in Sweet Thursday, Merlin in The Cup of Gold, the hermit in To A God Unknown, and the old man in The Short Reign of Pippin IV. None of these characters are misanthropic, but solitude is essential in order to understand the nature of man, the nature of themselves, and the relationship between the two. When the Joads cajole Casy into saying grace over their meal, he responds with:

> "I ain't sayin' I'm like Jesus," the preacher went on. "But I got tired like Him, an' I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin' stuff. Night time I'd lay on my back an' look up at the stars; mornin' I'd set an' watch the sun come up; midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country; evenin' I'd falla the sun down. Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was prayin' to or for.

> There was the hills, an' there was me; an' we wasn't seperate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy" (p. 71).

Casy is no longer a preacher. He is "Jus Jim Casy now. Ain't got the call no more. Got a lot of sinful ideas--but they seem kinda sensible." Casy's ideas also make him grotesque, not because they are "sinful" or abnormal, but because they are not conventional. But Casy does not care about convention. He has found a philosophy right for him. Since he knows his ideas are not accepted in organized religion, he believes he no longer has the right to be a preacher. Casy finds his conception of God after he has escaped from the restriction of the church. He has come to the realization that the body is equal to the spirit. This is exemplified by Casy's equating the act of sex to the sermons that he preached. After his sermons he seduced young girls of the congregation and discovered that sex could be as pleasurable as prayer. To corroborate the truth behind Casy's spiritual-sexual equation, we can look at Mrs. Sandry of Weedpatch who represents the fundamentalist attitude toward religion and sex. Steinbeck's feelings toward this attitude are quite obvious: he presents Mrs. Sandry as being an evil fanatic. She is so concerned with the degradation of all that concerns the body, that she is successful in destroying the spirit of many of her young "victims." Casy, on the other hand, found that one of the reasons he did not enjoy being a preacher is because people refused to even talk about sex or any other real subject when they were around him. "You know, it's a nice thing not bein' a preacher no more. Nobody use' to tell stories when I was there, or if they did I couldn' laugh. An' I couldn' cuss. Now I cuss all I want, anytime I want, an' it does a fella good to cuss if he wants to" (p. 60).

When Casy takes to the wilderness he understands that he will not return until he has a complete knowledge of the "Holy Sperit." He has read that this spirit is Jesus, but Casy is not satisfied. He needs to love the spirit and Jesus is just a name, a thing of the past. Casy wants to direct his love toward something in the present. He finds he is lonely in the wilderness, and with this discovery he has found the true transcendentalist spirit: "Maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit--the human sperit--the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of. Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of suddent--I knew it, I knew it so deep down that it was true, an' I still know it" (p. 20).

In telling others what he knows, Casy believes he can satiate his enormous love. In rescuing Floyd from the grasp of the deputy he is putting his spiritual awareness to a practical application. When he is caught by the deputies Jim Casy finally feels complete satisfaction while he "sat proudly, his head up and the stringy muscles of his neck prominent. On his lips there was a faint smile and on his face a curious look of conquest" (p. 238). His conquest has not been of an opposing system but of a personal "I" that, in its victory, has become the transcendental experience of "we."

In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath are novels in which the protagonist is the collective grotesque. The same can also be said of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. Yet, there are two important differences in the way Steinbeck handles the collective grotesque in the novels of the Monterey slums and novels of the migrants. The first difference is that In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath have a collective antagonist (as well as a collective protagonist), while Tortilla Flat and

Cannery Row do not. The second major difference is found in Steinbeck's tone while dealing with the grotesque. In Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row Steinbeck portrayed his characters as if he knew them.[17] The author wants to relive some of his past. However, Steinbeck is also satirical, since he shows the absurdities of contemporary bourgeois society. Steinbeck is neither nostalgic nor satirical in The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle. He is thoroughly bitter. The collective grotesque is mercilessly forced into its grotesque condition. Steinbeck cannot laugh at a Monster bank or a Marxist manipulator as he can a Rogue team or a butterfly festival. Monterey does not hurt the paisanos and derelicts. Like the bulldozer in The Grapes of Wrath, the Party Cause and the Western banks have the power to destroy whole classes of people.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Gloria Stolk, "Los Desposeídos De Steinbeck," Revista Nacional De Cultura, 24 (1962), p. 94.

[2]Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1961), p. 68.

[3]Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1963), p. 44.

[4]Maxwell Geismar, Writers In Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), p. 262.

[5]Lincoln R. Gibbs, "John Steinbeck: Moralist," Antioch Review (June 1942), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 98.

[6]Andre Gide, The Journals of Andre Gide, trans. Justin O'Brien, 4 (1939-49) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 448.

[7]Fontenrose, p. 43.

[8]T. K. Whipple, Study Out the Land (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1943), p. 109.

[9]Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p. 125.

[10]All references to "Their Blood Is Strong" applies to the edition contained in Warren French, ed., A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).

[11]James P. Degnan, "In Definite Battle: Steinbeck and California Land Monopolists," ed. Richard Astro and Tetsamuro Hayashi, Steinbeck: The Man and His Work (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1971), p. 66.

[12]Harry Thornton Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck (Chicago: Normandie House, 1939), p. 55.

[13]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 398.

[14]Geismar, pp. 263-64.

[15]Walter Allen, The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States (New York: E. P. Patton and Co. Inc., 1964), p. 164.

[16]Kazin, p. 264.

[17]In Travels With Charley, when Steinbeck visits his old home in Monterey, his conversation with a local bartender reveals that he truly did know many of the characters portrayed in both Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. Steinbeck's article "About Ed Ricketts" also shows us that many of these characters were based on real life acquaintances.

CHAPTER V

THE GROTESQUE AND NATURE

In many of his works, Steinbeck describes nature as though it had a mind of its own. This is especially obvious in passages dealing with the physical qualities of the Salinas Valley. In these passages Steinbeck endows the trees, the mountains, the grass, and the streams with human attributes. These descriptions, of course, remind us that Steinbeck had a great love for nature. In Sea of Cortez Steinbeck continually equated the qualities of mankind to the simple marine-organisms. Many of Steinbeck's characters also express a similar love for the natural world. Some even look upon elements of nature as personal acquaintances. When we look at a character like Doc in Cannery Row or Burton of In Dubious Battle, we feel that his relationship to nature, his respect for it, is healthy. Yet, Steinbeck creates many grotesques of nature, e.g., characters whose identification with the land, or characters whose need for possessing either land or animals is so strong, that identification and possession become monomanias. These grotesques lose sight of their own individuality and no longer view themselves as people, but as extensions of the parts of nature they need to possess.

The Long Valley

Although the majority of the stories contained in The Long Valley have no common theme, three stories show a grotesque relationship between

man and nature. "The Harness," "The Chrysanthemums," and "The White Quail" do not have the same characters but in Peter Randall, Eliza Allen, and Mary Teller we can observe a progression in the degree of grotesqueness. This is the progression, or more adequately regression, of man breaking away from his fellow human beings and merging himself in nature to such a degree that his relationship to it is grotesque.

In "The Harness" Peter Randall's relationship with other human beings is almost completely limited to his wife Emma. Emma has such complete control over Peter that the tie between them forces resentment and dependence rather than love. Peter thinks of himself as being a domesticated animal doomed forever to serve his master-wife. Even his neighbors sense in him an inexplicable hidden mixture of sadness and violence: "Peter's eyes were grave, too; blue and grave almost to the point of sorrowfulness. People knew there was force in him, but force held caged. Sometimes for no apparent reason, his eyes grew sullen and mean, but that look soon passed, and the restraint and probity came back into his face" (p. 74).

At various times Peter feels the need to explode in rebellion against his wife but he always stops because he realizes that his rebellion would have no direction--his wife would misunderstand any hostile action. Actually Emma is not the cause of restriction. It is Peter's strong sense of filial responsibility that makes him cater to her whims. He feels that he must always care for her because she is extremely thin and fragile, and she is always ill. Sometimes her illness is so severe that Peter must neglect his farm to look after her. He does all the housework and cooking and stays near enough so he can respond to her slightest need. His neighbors admire him for his loyalty and his

friends' wives send him pies and cakes whenever Emma is ill. At first he appreciates their kindness but as the sicknesses become more frequent, the pies and cakes become repulsive to him. They only remind him that his servitude has transformed him from a powerful farmer into a housemaid.

There are three reasons why Peter is admired throughout the community. The first of these is this seemingly uncompromising love and devotion to a burdensome wife. The second is his physique: "Inasmuch as farmers are usually slouchy men, Peter gained an added respect because of his posture." This is the most ironical element of the story because Peter actually is fatter and "slouchier" than most of his fellow farmers. His apparent solidness is a result of one of his wife's wishes. Emma wants Peter to wear a web harness that pulls his shoulders back and makes his stomach look flat and muscular. This harness becomes a physical symbol of Peter's psychological imprisonment. When Emma dies, Peter invites his friend Ed Chappel to have a drink with him and Peter continues drinking until thoroughly drunk. He then tears off his harness and enjoys the expression of shock he witnesses on his friend's face. He feels free of Emma and he takes pleasure in flaunting his obesity, which is actually a counter-symbol to the harness, for not only does he love his own, but he tells Ed, "I don't give a damn. I want a lot of everything. I want forty acres of color and smell. I want fat women, with breasts as big as pillows. I'm hungry, I tell you, I'm hungry for everything, for a lot of everything" (p. 82).

Every other farmer in the community looks to Peter to learn what is wise to grow in a particular season. They secretly believe that Peter has "extra reasoning powers and special prophetic knowledge" when it

comes to farming. The day after the funeral, Peter returns to his planting as he now feels free from the burden of household duties. Ironically, Peter discovers there is no freedom, for now his duty to his wife has become the cause of his duty to the land. The devotion to his dead wife seems to live on and Peter feels he can escape the bounds of this devotion only if he devotes his whole being to the farm. In other words, Peter works his land as if he were using it to forget his oppressive wife. He works eighteen hours a day, believing that a complete devotion to his farm will help him to regain his sense of manliness and independence. He grows sweet peas, not because he expects profit, but because it is not a good risk to grow them. He wants to take unwise risks to show his wife that he has escaped her harness. Yet he learns that escape is impossible. This is shown when we see him worrying the entire season about his crop. He does not fear the loss, but he fears the reproach of his wife for taking such a foolish step.

The crop turns out to be successful and Peter feels that the peas have shown that the harness has truly been broken. However, the feeling is ephemeral. Peter soon discovers that his farm has failed him because he cannot forget his domineering wife. In a desperate attempt to escape her memory he goes to San Francisco, rents a hotel room, and spends his time in its bars and brothels. At the same time Ed has to go to San Francisco to meet his wife's cousin coming in from Ohio. He accidentally runs into Peter who is drunkenly yelling in the hotel lobby where both of them are staying. When Ed takes Peter to his room Peter confesses that he cannot forget Emma. At first the tone of rebellion is at its most violent level as he screams that he has proven, "I won't wear that harness, and I damn well won't ever wear it. You remember

that." But his debauchery and drunkenness are not enough to erase Emma's image. Peter will not wear the symbol but he will always obey what is symbolized. He immediately changes his tone and tells Ed, "When I get back, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to put in electric lights. Emma always wanted electric lights."

Peter Randall tries to use nature (his land) as a weapon in a vendetta. His battle is futile, but he is at least able to distinguish between the nature of the land and the nature of himself. Such is not the case with Eliza Allen in "The Chrysanthemums." The reader is convinced that Eliza is more closely connected with her flowers than she is with other human beings, just by the way Steinbeck presents her as being unresponsive toward her husband.

Although the childless Eliza is by no means a passionate woman, when she is with her flowers the complacent acceptance of a housewife turns into a veritable fortitude. It seems as if she cannot give enough of herself to the chrysanthemums. She is described as "over-eager" and "over-powerful" in her care: "The chrysanthemums seemed too small and eager for her energy." When she sees anything that will threaten the safety of the flowers such as aphids, sowbugs, or snails, her "terrier fingers" take pleasure in the destruction of the pests. The only time she shows a positive response toward her husband is when he tells her, "You've got a gift with things. Some of those yellow chrysanthemums you had this year were ten inches across." She beams with delight as she has been complimented on her ability to create. But in this "creating" she is not merely the planter, but the mother who gives of herself and sees part of herself born with each new bud. She tries to explain the feeling to the itinerant tinker: "Everything goes right down into your

fingertips. You watch your fingers work. They do it themselves. You can feel how it is. They pick and pick the buds. They never make mistakes. They're with the plant. Do you see? Your fingers and the plant. You can feel that, right up your arm. They know. They never make a mistake. You can feel it. When you're like that you can't do anything wrong. Do you see that? Can you understand that" (p. 8)?

Watt compares the idea of the story with To A God Unknown, "Its theme is a favorite of Steinbeck's: the struggle to express desires which are ambiguously sexual and spiritual."[1] Watt has probably missed the point of the story which is exemplified in the passage quoted above. While the process of planting and picking engenders a sensual pleasure, this pleasure is more maternal than sexual. Eliza's happiness comes from the knowledge that her efforts will produce something beautiful. The gardening in itself does not provide satisfaction; it is the pride a perfect creation brings to her, and the knowledge that her work invariably results in perfection. The maternal quality in Eliza is seen when she finds that the chrysanthemums have been thrown in the road. Her perfect "offspring" have been left unappreciated and no one cares that they will die. The process of planting is not even considered; it is the fate of the product that forces tears from the eyes of an otherwise unemotional woman.

It is hard to see anything spiritual between Eliza and her flowers. Joseph Wayne, in To A God Unknown (as we will observe later), looks to nature to compensate for the lack of inner strength. Eliza seems to do just the opposite. Her chrysanthemums prove to her that she does have the power needed for making decisions as well as the power to create. She is bound to the flowers only because they corroborate her own

self-conception. In the flowers she perpetuates her own existence, but unlike Joseph Wayne and the natural elements, she realizes that they are totally dependent upon her.

The conflict of the story is centered on Eliza and the tinker. A cursory reading may result in viewing the tinker as a con-man who takes advantage of a naive country woman by manipulating her into giving him some business, taking the gift of her flowers, and maliciously throwing the flowers in the road so he can make use of a good pot. However, a close study of the story reveals that the conflict is not between the good Eliza and the evil tinker, but between a distorted sense of reality and sheer practicality. The destitute tinker travels throughout the countryside in search of just enough money to buy his next meal. He is well-travelled and knows that he must use all available means if he is to survive. Therefore, when he throws away the flowers and keeps the pot he is merely considering the fact that the pot may help to sustain him a little while longer.

On the other hand, Eliza is not concerned with mundane things like poverty. Her entire universe exists in the creation and care of her flowers and everything outside of this universe is not part of her concern. When she sees the flowers lying in the road she may be hurt, but there is a hope that she will finally escape from her limitations. The tinker has destroyed the flowers and in doing so has destroyed a part of her. Yet it is a vestige which has blinded her to the fact that her chrysanthemums are insignificant parts of nature that can easily be destroyed.

We must acknowledge the fact that Eliza, at one point in the story, has an impulse to touch the tinker, but still we cannot call this impulse

"sexual." Eliza is not attracted to the tinker, but to what he represents. The tinker has no ties, no obligations to anyone, while Eliza feels restricted being a farmer's housewife. Her chrysanthemums provide an escape from her complacent existence, but at the same time her garden, after all, is on the farm. The tinker, on the other hand, travels all over the countryside, and this freedom appeals to Eliza.

Eliza has an abnormally strong sense of "oneness" between the creations--her flowers and herself, the creator. With Mary Teller in "The White Quail" the identification with a natural object is so strong that she often has no conception of her real identity. Fontenrose comments, "Mary Teller is a superb portrait of a narcissistic woman."[2] Although it is true that Mary epitomizes self-love, it is a schizophrenic self-love. Actually, she is dissatisfied with herself until she sees the albino quail in her garden. At that point she feels as if she has finally found the true Mary Teller: "'Why, she's like me.' A powerful ecstasy quivered in her body. 'She's like the essence of me, an essence boiled down to utter purity. She must be the queen of the quail. She makes every lovely thing that ever happened to me one thing. . . . This is the me that was everything beautiful. This is the center of me, my heart'" (pp. 22-23).

In part four of the story Mary goes out into the garden to find her shears and while standing there she looks into the sitting room. In a surrealistic dream-like passage, Mary imagines that she sees herself in the room knitting. She is appalled by the Mary that she sees, the one that is "just sitting there." Mary has no idea what the girl in her vision is like or what she is thinking about. This other Mary has no connection with her. Suddenly she discovers why. She is in the garden

and only here can she begin to realize her true "essence." Still, Mary knows that she must return to her house. She is a human being and human beings cannot live in gardens. Nevertheless, she tries to center all her activities on the garden. She even chooses her spouse on the basis that he will be good for her garden. "She didn't think so much, 'Would the man like such a garden?' but, 'Would the garden like such a man?' For the garden was herself and after all she had to marry someone she liked" (p. 13).

When Harry Teller proposes to Mary, she condescends to let him kiss her while all the time thinking of nothing but her garden. Harry becomes not only acceptable but perfectly suited to her distorted ends because he grows afraid of her and thus she can lock her husband out of her garden world. She controls him because he fears something monstrous behind an apparently innocent mind. He tells her, "Well you're kind of untouchable. There's an inscrutability about you. Probably you don't even know it yourself. You're kind of like your own garden--fixed and just so. I'm afraid to move around. I might disturb some of your plants" (p. 16). Mary expresses dissatisfaction with Harry's job at the loan company because it is not part of a natural ambience and thus not part of her "essence." She also feels he may be taking advantage of people. Harry denies this but he cannot stand the thought of his wife's disapproval. But she cannot tolerate his indifference toward her garden. So she goes to the bedroom and locks the door. Harry tries the door silently and then decides not to disturb her lest he should awaken the "monster" that may be lying dormant. He later asks her if he can have an Irish setter pup a friend has offered him. Harry needs this dumb companion to compensate for his wife's lack of interest in him. While Mary

sympathizes with him, she is horrified by the thought of the damage a dog can do to a garden. The upshot of this incident is that Mary is now certain that Harry is not sympathetic toward her world. In defense she places an even higher barrier between herself and Harry.

Mary Teller has no need for her husband, or for that matter, anyone or anything outside of her garden. But eventually Mary finds that even the garden is too inanimate to supply her with an identity. Therefore, when she sees the white quail, in the midst of many other birds, she believes she has found the being that can give her the "essence" she desires. The white quail continues to come to the garden daily and Mary lives only for the time when she will again see the bird. But the quail becomes more than just a companion, it comes to represent for Mary her true self. It seems to permit her to escape what she considers vulgar and unspiritual housewife duties to an insensitive husband in a dreary house.

To A God Unknown

Of all Steinbeck's novels his third, To A God Unknown, is the most cryptic. It contains a curious combination of Christ-symbolism and pagan ritual. At some moments it tries to achieve a transcendentalist concept of unity; at other moments, it celebrates the ideal of the noble savage. At times it is highly erotic as it approaches what Edward Wagenknecht calls "obvious Lawrence"[3] and Watt deems "sexual animism."[4] At other times it is almost asexual in its lack of sensationalism of any sort as well as its lack of any well-developed male-female relationships. In short, To A God Unknown is a conglomeration of many opposing concepts and there are many different grotesques that personify these concepts.

The most singularly grotesque character in the novel is Willie Romas. From the first description of him we know that he is so tormented mentally that his physical appearance is distorted: "Willie's face was twisted and white with some unknown illness under the crusting of dirt, and Willie's eyes were tortured and frightened, for no one believed in the pains which shook his body in the night and no one believed the dark dreams which tortured him when he slept" (p. 10). Willie is afraid of the unknown. He thinks he is different from others, yet he also feels secure around others. Tularecito (The Pastures of Heaven), another demented grotesque, cannot feel secure until he returns to the "father" that Miss Morgan has intimated lives underground. Thus, Tularecito frantically digs holes to find what he thinks is his real family. Willie also occupies himself with holes but to him these holes exist only to threaten his life. Willie dreams he is in a barren land that is full of holes and in these holes are strange people who come out and pull off his arms and legs, a dream that recurs so often Willie cannot distinguish between the world of the dream and the real world.

Willie is one of the five grotesques of nature in To A God Unknown. But unlike the other four, grotesque because of their over-identification with either their surroundings or animals, Willie is grotesque because of his extraordinary fear of the land. Eventually Willie reaches the point where he imagines that any of the countryside without vegetation is a breeding ground for the hole-dwellers. When he sees ultimately a beach with holes in it, he is convinced that the nightmare has become a reality. Driven by fear and confusion, he hangs himself.

While all the Wayne brothers are grotesque, only Thomas and Joseph have grotesque relationships to the natural world. Of the Wayne

brothers, Thomas comes closest to being normal. Harry Thornton Moore dismisses him as being merely "plain and quiet mannered, a lover of the animals and the farm world."[5] Lisca states, "Although like Joseph he is close to nature, his relationship to it is that of a healthy animal."[6] The fact that Thomas is much less voluble than his brothers actually makes his grotesqueness less obvious. It is true that he is "close to nature" and it is true that his relationship to it mainly exists in his attitude toward animals. But this relationship seems to be anything but "healthy." Thomas is successful at becoming close to animals because, like Pirate in Tortilla Flat, he is uncomfortable with people. This trait is exemplified during Joseph's fiesta. Thomas goes into the barn to find a sanctuary. He is escaping from the mass of people gathered together to make noise and enjoy themselves "for he was afraid of the wild emotion as an animal is afraid of thunder." When the people get louder he strokes the neck of a horse to soothe his own discomfort. Another instance of his abnormal tie with animals occurs when Thomas sees the hermit's caged animals. He is angry because he identifies with their condition. Yet while he can empathize with the frustration of a captive animal, he is incapable of sympathizing with an old man's need for food. When one of Thomas' dogs has an eye injured during a fight with a raccoon, Thomas remains calm:

> He scraped out the torn eye-ball with his pocket knife and pinched the dog's feet to make it forget the torture in his head. Thomas liked animals and understood them, and he killed them with no more feeling than they had about killing each other. He was too much an animal himself to be sentimental. Thomas never lost a cow, for he seemed to know instinctively where a straying beef would stray. He rarely hunted, but when he did go out for game, he marched straight to the hiding place of his prey and killed it with the speed and precision of a lion (p. 19).

Like Mary Teller in "The White Quail," Thomas prefers animals to people. Because Thomas mistrusts human nature, he consciously takes on many of the traits of his animals.

Elizabeth, Joseph's wife, has emotions and motives that are grotesquely primitive. We can even observe this in her rationale for accepting Joseph. Joseph sets out to find a wife merely because a wife is necessary to complete his home. The courtship is brief, without any sign of love on his part. Before meeting Joseph she is sexually frustrated and in order to alleviate her frustration she needs (or thinks she needs) more than a mere man. She grows to love her husband but she still says to herself, "If only he had the body of a horse I might love him more."

Obviously Joseph cannot satisfy this wish and Elizabeth feels isolated and lonely because Joseph simply cannot fit her fantasies properly. Thus, she begins to show her essentially grotesque personality by directing her affections toward a large rock in an enclosed valley. At first she fears it and yet she is nearly hypnotized by its complete starkness. While pregnant she visits the rock because, as she tells Joseph, "It seems to give me something I needed." What she needs is a natural object with which she can sympathize. The stream that flows around the rock is the union of the fertile and the barren and thus Elizabeth believes she has found her counterpart in nature. However, she eventually reaches the point where mere sympathy is not enough. She is convinced she is part of the rock: "I went into the rock. The little stream was flowing out of me and I was the rock, and the rock was--I don't know--the rock was the strongest dearest thing in the world" (p. 123). She feels a primitive urge and thinks she has grasped a mystical truth. Yet, her

"truth" is the result of distorted thinking. The tragic result is that she slips and kills herself when she attempts to climb her oracle.

The hermit, like Elizabeth, has misconstrued his relationship with nature. His theories are truly results of, as Ross puts it, religious "fetishism."[7] Like Elizabeth, he has the demented belief that human beings are meaningless unless they are parts of natural objects. He believes that, in his case, the sun is his natural counterpart. The hermit lives upon a high cliff overlooking the sea. He chooses this spot because he is certain that here he can always be "the last man in the western world to see the sun." To prove that the sun is his counterpart he performs a ritual every night. As the sun goes down he sacrifices a pig, a squirrel, or a rabbit. The hermit has the insane idea that the heat of the sun mixes with the heat of the animal's pain as it dies. The fact that his hand is on the knife that has caused death permits him to think that since the sun will rise the next day, through killing the animal he has given the sun a new life. The sun and the hermit will sleep at night, but in the morning both will rise with, what he considers to be, the same new life. It is the "same" because he eats the animal that he has sacrificed to the sun.

Although the hermit is nothing short of fanatical, he is content in his dream world. He does not try to impose his theories on others because he knows that they will think he is crazy. His entire life is centered on this single ritual but because he gets fulfillment from his act he fulfills his entire life, and as a hermit he has no one to interfere with this fulfillment or this act. With Joseph Wayne the fanaticism becomes overpowering. His devotion to the land is so complete that there is no room for personal fulfillment. Joseph is grotesque primarily

because of his mistaken conception of the group-organism. He feels that as part of something outside of himself (e.g., Joseph's group-organism) he must die so this something can perpetuate itself. Like his brother Burton, Joseph is a religious fanatic. Yet Joseph's fanaticism is directed at a type of pagan god, a "God Unknown."

When Joseph first sees his land in California, he feels an extreme sense of pride. After this first sense of exaltation subsides, he begins to wonder if he will not be overpowered by the spirit of the place. He tells his brother Thomas, "A man has to have something to live for, something he can trust to be there in the morning" (p. 28). In this instance there is nothing severely abnormal about his attitude, the land is merely a medium through which he can express his presence in an unstable world. This simple pride, however, begins to develop into a neurotic mysticism. He tells Elizabeth, "There are times when the people and the hills and the earth, all, everything except the stars are one, and the love of them all is strong like a sadness" (p. 56). As far as Steinbeck is concerned, there is nothing abnormal about loving "the people and the hills and the earth." Yet, Joseph begins to show signs of dementia when he puts "stars" in even the same phrase with the more tangible objects. For later on in the novel Joseph becomes a monomaniac in trying to communicate with these stars.

He begins to worship the stars and they become his god, or more accurately, his "God Unknown." When his attempts to communicate fail he directs his worship toward a more "knowable" object--the tree overlooking his property. For Joseph the tree is symbolic of his dead father as well as the "God Unknown." Because he worships it, he makes sacrifices to it and even places his newly born son in its limbs claiming he is

introducing the boy to his grandfather. Despite the admonitions of his wife, who is alarmed by Joseph's loss of contact with reality, he continues to worship the tree.

When Burton kills the tree, Joseph believes that the land must accept the punishment. This punishment comes in the form of a drought. Joseph goes to the dead tree for spiritual guidance. He needs to know how to cope with the disaster, but the tree is dead and so he must find another symbol of the "God Unknown." He finds this symbol when he sees the rock (the same rock from which Elizabeth fell) and begins to practice sacrificial rituals. He even kills a calf so that the rock, his god, may have nourishment. The moss on the rock comes to represent for him the last element of life and so he takes water from a nearby stream and throws it on the moss: "As he worked he knew the rock no longer as a thing separated from him." The rock, inanimate and the most barren of objects, now represents for Joseph, all that is life, all that is himself, and all that is the "God Unknown." Even the land has become his enemy because it will rob the rock of the stream's water. Thus, Joseph frantically takes water from the stream and throws it on the rock as if he were racing against the land. However, the moss on the rock dies and so Joseph believes that the rock is also dead. Joseph strokes the rock as he stroked the dead tree. Since the rock is dead, Joseph feels that his life should also naturally come to an end. Thus, he kills himself hoping that his suicide will show the "God Unknown" that he is still completely devoted to it.

Joseph kills himself because he does not want to be part of the physical world unless he can gain access to the metaphysical world (e.g., the "God Unknown"). He repudiates his community, his family, the land,

and finally his own existence. He convinces himself that only if he relinquishes the earth will he at last be able to commune with his grotesque deity.

Of Mice and Men

So far this chapter has considered characters with generalized, intense, and sometimes destructive relationships with the land. In Of Mice and Men, the characters are grotesque because of their frequently imperfect and distorted relationship to particular pieces of property. Of all the critics Frederic I. Carpenter seems to come the closest to understanding Steinbeck's conception of the novel:[8] "It has been said that the story is not tragic because its characters lack tragic significance. But I think the story is tragic although it is not primarily tragedy of character. It is a tragedy of idea. These 'heroes' achieve significance because they give expression to the American dream in its simplest form."[9] Those who disparage Of Mice and Men invariably do so on the basis that they consider Steinbeck presumptuous in trying to arouse compassion for morons and derelicts. It was fine to laugh and enjoy the carefree antics of the same type of characters in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, but when it comes to creating sympathetic characters in George and Lennie, critics feel that these characters are just too trivial. However, as Carpenter suggests, the novel is not about George and Lennie, but about a general human need to have a place under the sun. Steinbeck's alternative titles point to this focus upon the need for property. Steinbeck's original title was "Something That Happened," a title which tries to utilize understatement. It is merely "something" that happens to George and Lennie, because anything that happens to the

likes of these insignificant characters cannot be important. Yet, Steinbeck's "something" actually has a profound significance. It implies the failure to achieve a goal in the fate of all rootless individuals, since George and Lennie are symbols of the rootless.

We find Steinbeck's specific intention in creating this book if we look at his second title. This title is taken from Robert Burns' poem "To A Mouse," lines 39-40: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft a-gley." The phrase "o' mice an' men" has the same meaning in both the poem and the novel. In both instances the words signify universal despair because of an inability of the great and the small to realize their goals. Steinbeck never intends that his major characters should be taken as universal men because they are grotesques, and as grotesques they are representative of a very small part of humanity. Thus, at least in the eyes of the norm, they are mice in a world of men. But Steinbeck's point is if the grotesque, the rootless, suffer from unrealized dreams, the norm (as the "men" part of the title, in that they have a higher place on the social scale) can also suffer when they fail to fulfill ambitions.

Two of the "mice" (e.g., the grotesques of the novel) are Curley and his wife. Curley is a bully who picks a fight with Lennie and takes great pleasure in having the chance to hurt him. Yet despite Curley's pugnacious and vindictive nature, he is not Steinbeck's villain. Steinbeck presents Curley as a foil to Lennie, but Steinbeck uses the two not primarily as adversaries but as grotesques with one important similarity: both are lonely and neither can get what he wants. Candy explains to George the reason behind Curley's ill temper: "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps

with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy" (p. 29). Although Curley is not mentally deficient, physically, to his own way of thinking, he is grotesque. His size makes him feel inferior and Lennie, being a giant, symbolizes a dream that Curley can never fulfill. Steinbeck presents the fight with Lennie merely to make this failure definitive and concrete. Lennie crushes the hand that makes Curley a "big man." It is a hand that is quick in the boxing ring and it is a hand that Curley flaunts as a sign of his sexual success with a voluptuous wife. But with one squeeze the giant Lennie eradicates all of Curley's bigness. The intent of the combatants also serves to show the universality of failure. The small Curley wants to hurt his opponent. The gargantuan Lennie wants to escape confrontation altogether. Curley is irrevocably injured and Lennie has no choice but to inflict injury.

Watt characterizes Curley's wife as being "sluttish."[10] Fontenrose calls her "a tawdry, rather stupid young woman, interested only in attracting men."[11] It is true that the ranch hands call her "tramp" and "tease," but although Curley's wife enjoys the company of men, the reasons are not related to sex. She seeks this company because she is lonely and her dream is simply to have a friend. Curley does not respect her, nor does he even talk to her. To Curley, she is just another way to make himself appear big. He uses her flashy appearance to show larger men that he is capable of having a girl like this any time he chooses. Since he practically ignores her, he forces her to seek company in the lowest places. But even in Crooks' barn-room she is rejected. Crooks and Candy look at her suspiciously and they do not want her around. She resorts to Lennie and finds that although he is "Jus' like a big baby,"

he is the one person that she can actually talk to without having her motives questioned. Nevertheless, her attempts to establish a meaningful relationship fail. Lennie is not intelligent enough to understand that the girl is lonely and that she merely wants to talk. As a result these two grotesques cannot communicate.

Candy, like Curley's wife, has roots because he belongs to the ranch. Yet, he is a grotesque of insecurity and loneliness. The only possession that gives him any sort of pleasure is his dog. But his dog is old and with old age comes an odor unbearable to Carlson and the rest of the bunkmates. Carlson urges Candy to let him kill the dog. It is the last thing that Candy wants to do but Candy is among the lowest of the "mice." He is powerless to object. He can only answer with meekness, "I been around him so much I never notice how he stinks," and "I'm so used to him, I had him from a pup." As Carlson takes the dog out to shoot it Candy can only lie on his bed staring and reminiscing about the good times he and his dog have had.

Because Candy is also old, he realizes that he will also eventually lose his job, the only degree of security he ever had. When he hears of Lennie's dreams and plans, he begs George to let him become a part of the venture. He offers to give George every cent he owns. George consents and Candy, although he adopts it, finally has a dream of his own: "Everybody wants a little piece of land, not much. Jus' som'thin' that was his. Som'thin' he could live on and there couldn't nobody throw him off of it" (p. 83). But Candy is doomed to lose this dream almost as fast as he obtained it. He has money but money is meaningless without a concrete direction for its use. George and Lennie have supplied him with this direction and George and Lennie take it away. When Lennie kills

Curley's wife the dream dies also. "Now Candy spoke his greatest fear. 'You an' me can get that little place, can't we George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we?' Before George answered, Candy dropped his head and looked down at the hay. He knew" (p. 103). The man with one hand momentarily was presumptuous enough to think he could achieve happiness. The vanity of human wishes has dealt him a blow that will again relegate him to resignation and despair. Steinbeck tragically forces us to realize that he will never step out of this position again.

Crooks' grotesque condition is implied by his name: he has a crooked back as a result of being kicked by a horse. To further intensify his isolation he is a black man, the resident "nigger" of the ranch. Crooks develops a defensive facade of pride. He keeps his distance from others because he wants to prove that he can exist without companionship. He needs to maintain a sense of dignity and only in isolation, where there is no one with whom he can compare himself, can he see himself in a favorable light. This is the reason that he does not want Lennie, Candy, or anyone else to come into his room. However, Lennie's simplicity, and also Lennie's own obvious inferiority encourages Crooks to drop the barrier of silence and reveal that he needs companionship as much as anyone else:

> "This is just a nigger talkin' an' a busted-back nigger. So it don't mean nothin', see? You couldn't remember it anyway. I see it over an' over--a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is, they're talkin', or they're settin' still not talkin'. It don't make no difference." His excitement had increased and he pounded his knee with his hand. "George can tell you screwy things, and it don't matter. It's just the talkin', it's just bein' with another guy. That's all." He paused (p. 78).

Crooks is the cynic in Of Mice and Men and of all the characters comes closest to representing the author's views. Crooks believes that no man, no matter what his stature in society may be, can fulfill his dreams. Thus, one should not have dreams since it only hurts when one sees them destroyed. Crooks wants companionship, but he is not foolish enough to think of companionship as a goal because as a "nigger" in a white man's world, this type of dream is absurd. Yet, Crooks points out to Lennie, as a white man Lennie can always have companionship. Therefore he (Lennie) should not wish for something unattainable but should take advantage of the happiness readily available to him. Lennie has a companion George, and Crooks realizes that Lennie should consider this friendship to be more precious than any ranch. Crooks has neither a George nor a Lennie, but because he is a cynic he resigns himself to the fact that friendship is beyond his reach.

The relationship between George and Lennie is the closest we come to the "group-organism" in Of Mice and Men. Both characters are working toward the goal of having their own ranch. Although they never attain this goal, we still admire the qualities within each of them that lets them maintain their love for one another. Their ambition is futile but as Crooks tells Lennie, a life-long companion is dream enough. George also realizes this. He tells Slim, "It's a lot nicer to go around with a guy you know." Slim agrees but cannot understand why George picks an idiot for a partner. George is quick to defend Lennie, "He ain't no cuckoo. He's dumb as hell, but he ain't crazy. An' I ain't so bright neither, or I wouldn't be buckin' barley for my fifty and found. If I was bright if I was even a little bit smart, I'd have my own place, an'

I'd be bringin' in my own crops, stead of doin' all the work and not getting what comes up outa the ground" (p. 43).

That Lennie needs George is obvious, but as Slim observes, why does George need Lennie? Why is this relationship not just one-sided? Lisca believes that "George needs Lennie as a rationalization for his failure."[12] The above passage would indicate just what this failure is. But George is not defending himself, he is defending Lennie and actually deprecating his own inabilities. George constantly talks about the dream but he does so for the sake of Lennie. He loves Lennie and feels the need to make him happy. The telling of the dream becomes a ritual in which the teller and the listener experience great joy. In looking at the two parts of the ritual one can see exactly why George travels with Lennie and why he does so out of necessity rather than obligation to Aunt Clara. The first part of the speech begins, "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place." But George is not talking about himself and his companion, he is talking about other transients. The second part makes the distinction: "With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us." In other words, George is telling Lennie, "We'll make it because I've got you and you've got me." The dream serves to bind two friends in the same way that Pirate's bag of money unites the paisanos in Tortilla Flat. Only Pirate received an actual benefit, but the paisanos found happiness in working together toward something. Neither George nor Lennie gets his own piece of land, but as George indicates when he finds Lennie has killed Curley's wife, he does not want the land unless he can share it with Lennie. He has Candy's money and has the means to purchase the

property, but he no longer has the only thing that mattered--the only thing he owned: the uncompromising devotion and friendship of an idiot.

Although Lennie is "simple," his dream and subsequently his dilemma are complex. Ross believes that Lennie is an example of Steinbeck's "irrational intuition that whatever is 'natural' is good. Lennie literally has no mind; consequently, being incapable of artificiality of conduct, he is completely 'natural.'"[13] Ross seems to be equating "natural" with sub-normal and in doing so actually denies the validity of Steinbeck's theory concerning man and his relationship to nature. Steinbeck's "natural" men range from the primitivistic Pilon in Tortilla Flat to the nonteleological observers such as Doc in Cannery Row, Jim Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, and Samuel Hamilton in East of Eden. All of these latter characters are profound thinkers and their profundity enables them to become "natural," e.g., to live in the world and still remain uninfluenced by the decadence that surrounds them. Another indication of their "naturalness" is their ability to perceive that man and nature are united when both benefit. Such is not the case with Mary Teller, Joseph Wayne, or Lennie Small, who are actually Steinbeck's unnatural characters. Their attitudes toward nature are irrational. Lennie, unlike George, is not satisfied with the dream, or even with the promise of its eventual realization. He must constantly have a piece of nature in his possession such as a rabbit, a mouse, or a puppy, but the rationality to guide this need is missing. Thus, Lennie does not have enough of nature, but nature has an oversupply of Lennie. It resists his uncontrollable affection: the puppy bites, the mouse squirms, the girl grows afraid, and Lennie, not capable of understanding the emotions

of nature, destroys these various elements of nature and is ultimately destroyed himself.

Lennie feels that he must constantly prove to George that he is capable of handling responsibility so that George will let him be "keeper of the rabbits" on the ranch. However, each time he begins a project, he kills the animal. When Lennie kills the puppy he grows angry with the dead animal because he believes he fails in his final chance to display responsibility. His anger is compounded because he is confused. A puppy is bigger than a mouse. It should not have died from his petting. Lennie does not understand and his failure to understand convinces him, as he knows it will George, that he is not intelligent enough to be in charge of the rabbits.

When Curley's wife tells Lennie that she likes him, he thinks that he has an additional opportunity to show that he has a sense of responsibility. This thought occurs to him when she permits him to stroke her hair. Lennie feels the softness of the hair and is reminded of all the soft animals he has petted. Now, however, the softness is that of a human being and Lennie has this softness in his hands. When the girl moves her head, Lennie panics. As a grotesque of feeling, Lennie does not know how to control himself even in moments of the slightest amounts of tenderness. He will not release her hair, she screams, and he suddenly realizes that, once again, he has abused his responsibility. He wants to stop the screaming because it signifies his failure. After he kills the girl, he regains his senses and realizes that he "done another bad thing." Lennie goes to the sanctuary by the pond and waits for George. At this juncture, George tragically realizes that he has a responsibility which cannot be fulfilled by mere ritual. He must save Lennie, not only

from Curley, Carlson, and the rest of an unsympathetic society, but also from Lennie himself. George fulfills this responsibility by killing Lennie. It is not a punishment but an act of love and of mercy.

Lennie, Small, Joseph Wayne, and Mary Teller (to name a few) are grotesques because of their abnormal relationships with nature. The question arises, "Why does Steinbeck create grotesques of this type?" To pose an answer to this question, let us refer to Travels With Charley. This book is especially charming because of the many anthropomorphic descriptions Steinbeck gives to Charley, his large, blue standard poodle. But when we consider some of the grotesques treated in this chapter, Steinbeck's descriptions lose some of their charm. These descriptions may seem entertaining and cute, but at the same time they are also revealing. Charley is a dog, but in all that Steinbeck writes about himself, Charley appears as the writer's closest friend. We have already seen how Steinbeck felt isolated from a large part of his society and this sense of isolation subtly appears in Travels With Charley. Steinbeck is so attached to his dog because he has a very difficult time establishing a relationship with other human beings. It would be absurd to say that this relationship parallels the one between Mary Teller and the white quail, but nevertheless Steinbeck is more comfortable with Charley than with anyone he meets during his journey around the country. Charley is not merely his pet, he is a sagacious, insidious, temperamental, and often superior creature whom Steinbeck describes with more insight than he demonstrates in his portrayal of human beings. Given this grotesque inadequacy in our author, we can see that characters like Lennie are not convenient creations, but the outgrowth of loneliness.

FOOTNOTES

[1]F. W. Watt, John Steinbeck (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1962), p. 92.

[2]Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1963), p.

[3]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), p. 446.

[4]Watt, p. 33.

[5]Harry Thornton Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck (Chicago: Normandie House, 1939), p. 24.

[6]Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p. 44.

[7]Woodburn O. Ross, "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," Studies in Honor of A. H. R. Fairchild (1946), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 172.

[8]Many critics have wondered if Of Mice and Men has enough scope to be a tragedy. Specifically dealing with this question, George F. Whicher comments, "It is difficult to strike the note of tragedy if the persons of the drama have no more dignity than chipmunks." Edward Wagenknecht holds a similar point of view: "Of Mice and Men is unsatisfactory because it tries to squeeze tragedy out of characters who lack tragic stature and in Lennie's case even human significance." There are those, on the other hand, who believe that the story is not only a fine literary achievement, but also a work in which Steinbeck achieves tragic intensity. Burton Rascoe states, in speaking of the play version of Of Mice and Men, "Compassion for the misfits of life, for those who are handicapped by the imponderables of heredity and environment and for those who are warped physically and emotionally, is so deeply and so understandingly felt and expressed by Steinbeck that, before the curtain comes down on the first act, the light, superficially cynical mood of the less sensitive members of the audience has changed, and pity and wonder has taken possession of them."

[9]Frederic I. Carpenter, "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer," The Southwest Review, July 1941, rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 76.

[10]Watt, p. 61.

[11]Fontenrose, p. 55.

[12]Lisca, p. 141.

[13]Woodburn O. Ross, "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," Studies in Honor of A. H. R. Fairchild (1946), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 175.

CHAPTER VI

FROM THE GROTESQUE TO THE ALIENATED HERO

After Cannery Row in 1945, Steinbeck's fiction begins to show a change in emphasis. No longer does Steinbeck concentrate on the half-wits such as Lennie in Of Mice and Men and Pirate in Tortilla Flat. Nor does he deal with obsessed characters such as Joseph Wayne in To A God Unknown or George Battle and Raymond Banks in The Pastures of Heaven. Steinbeck realizes that in the modern community the rootless such as the migrant laborer or transient ranch hand would be out of place. Therefore, Steinbeck's new type of character is no longer the grotesque but the alienated hero. Stienbeck's alienated hero is accepted by the society as being part of that society. He is an intrinsic part of his community because it likes and often respects him. There is nothing grotesque about his alienated hero because his fellow citizens believe that he is just like them. Below the social facade, however, the alienated hero feels totally estranged because his moral values are antithetical to those of his community. Although he is neither mentally deficient nor physically handicapped like Steinbeck's grotesques, he considers himself to be an anomaly within society and thus he rejects his society.

In 1941 we find Steinbeck's first alienated hero in his script for The Forgotten Village, a film documentary concerning a small Mexican town. The alienated hero is the young boy Juan Diego. Juan is the eldest child of a well-respected farmer. He is very happy living in the village

and everyone considers him a fine boy. One day an epidemic strikes the community and the people try to fight it with magic potions and spells. Juan is convinced that these archaic means are the most effective weapons, and in believing so he is further established as conforming to the ideals of his community. Of course these "cures" do not work and many people grow sick. A few children even die. Yet the only response of the village is to increase the number of charms and spells.

Juan's school teacher is the only enlightened man in the community. He is convinced that there is something wrong with the water. When Juan hears his teacher's theory he too believes that the disease is being caused by something more than evil demons. The teacher believes that doctors should be brought in, and so he tells this to the townspeople. Instead of heeding the wisdom of their teacher, they are offended by the presumption that science can be more effective than their time-honored customs. Yet people continue to get sick and more are dying. When Juan's sister is infected with the disease, he agrees to help the teacher bring in a doctor. But Juan is banished when his father discovers his plan. He subsequently kidnaps his sister and takes her to the city to get modern medical care.

The Forgotten Village is actually not much more than a children's story containing the moral: you will only hurt yourself if you are close-minded. Yet in the character of Juan Diego we see an elementary treatment of the alienated hero. Juan can be readily likened to Dr. Stockmann in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. Both Juan and Stockmann are important parts of their respective communities. Yet, when Stockmann suspects that there is something in the Baths that causes disease, his fellow townspeople urge him to suppress his theory. The Baths bring tourists to the

town and tourists bring money. When Stockmann insists on exposing and condemning the Baths, the people grow hostile toward him and try to force him out of the community. Juan Diego, like Stockmann, loves his home and his village. It is this love which will not permit him to stand by and watch his people die merely because of pride. Whereas Stockmann's moral sense alienated him, love and wanting to do what is best for the village are Juan's motivations. Yet when Juan leaves his home and takes up residence in the city, he too shows signs of feeling disgust toward the narrow-mindedness of his village. Still, he is not the complete Steinbeck alienated hero because he is able to escape from the wrongs of his community and start a new brand of life. But in forming standards of judgment other than those his village imposes upon him, he is an obvious prototype for later characters.

The Wayward Bus

The California of Steinbeck's The Wayward Bus is not idealized as in previous novels. While California is still the setting, the action of The Wayward Bus could have taken place in any part of rural America because Steinbeck was no longer writing about a region, but about an entire society. He realized that his subject was not indigenous to a specific locale, but it was a subject that applied to an entire nation. Antonia Seixas believes that the characters in The Wayward Bus "are people we see around us every day, caught as we all are caught in traps of our own making--our hypocritical beliefs, our shallow dreams drawn from movies, magazine ads, and success stories."[1] The bus is the microcosm in which the characters collectively form a representative America. When the bus is trapped in the mud, the travellers come to realize that their situation

is distasteful because they are loathsome to themselves. Although they find that confinement in itself is painless, they come to realize that being confined with callous and sick people makes the experience unpleasant.

Juan Chicoy, Steinbeck's alienated hero in the novel, is only able to consider the travelers as a unit. He is not able to see them as individuals because they are so much like the people who have traveled his route time and time again. They are noisy, ill-mannered, self-centered and indifferent to anything not concerned with arriving at their destination on time. Although Juan is Steinbeck's spokesman, he holds this position only insofar as the passengers are repugnant to him. Both the author and the bus driver feel that these people are mentally unbalanced. But there is a significant difference between John Steinbeck and Juan Chicoy. Juan believes that his passengers are grotesque and that he is normal. Steinbeck, on the other hand, has matured to the point that he can realize that the passengers are not grotesques. The passengers fit into their society's mold, and in doing so no one within that society can ever question their normality.

In The Wayward Bus contemporary society is symbolized by the irascible lawyer Van Brunt, the conformist Mr. Pritchard, his undersexed wife Bernice, and oversexed daughter Mildred. The grotesques in the novel are Juan's alcoholic wife Alice, Norma, the homely waitress at his roadside inn, and his handyman Pimples (whose name signifies his appearance). These three grotesques desperately want to belong to the society of Van Brunts and the Pritchards. Juan, on the other hand, as Steinbeck's alienated hero, has more of society than he can tolerate. Actually Juan is not merely one who communicates with contemporary civilization. In

driving the bus that moves representatives of this civilization he is, metaphorically, a leader of it. It is not a literal leadership like that of Van Brunt who uses his social position to assert his influence. Juan actually leads others by leading himself. Unlike Van Brunt, he is not concerned with society. He does not like its ways and so he leaves it alone as much as he can. When he must come into contact with it, he refuses to let it dictate his actions and since he is thoroughly intransigent in this respect, it often yields to him.[2] Juan has no use for Van Brunt or the Pritchards, but he has a responsibility to drive them to San de la Cruz. Still, he will tolerate them only as long as they do not interfere with his obligation. When Van Brunt tries to take command, and when the passengers begin to question his decisions, he abandons them. He lets Mildred follow him to the barn and seduce him not because he desires her, but because he enjoys being a means for her revenge upon a part of society they both despise--the middle-class world of Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard.

Frederick Bracher observes that "Juan Chicoy in The Wayward Bus lives a philosophy instead of thinking or talking one."[3] Juan is essentially reticent because he distrusts words. The conversation of the Pritchard's society only points out vanity and mediocrity. Juan believes that the only way in which he can have a purposeful dialogue is to address the small metal Virgin of Guadalupe that rests on his dashboard. This object is Juan's only friend: "Juan Chicoy, while not a believer in the orthodox sense, now he was fifty, would nevertheless have been uneasy driving the bus without the Guadalupan to watch over him" (p. 13). As Juan is trying to decide which road to take, he comes to the realization that the decision will actually have no meaning as far as his own

personal life is concerned. He therefore tells the Virgin that he wants her to take the responsibility--to give him a sign that will show him which way to go. "I am putting this in your hands. I am on this 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 for my safety or happiness, but only for their own plans. I think they have not even seen me. I'm an engine to get them where they're going" (p. 150). Juan believes that the Virgin is giving him a sign when he finds the road is not smooth. Therefore he decides that he must take the other path and ultimately leave the bus in the mud. His passengers have no feeling for him and so he will let them care for themselves.

Woodburn O. Ross believes that "to Juan the image [the Virgin] is a kind of talisman, something in which he does not believe rationally but to which the depths of his mind do respond. A primitive part of his nature, uncomplicated by reason, finds in this image itself, in an animistic fashion, power, wisdom, and sympathy."[4] The Virgin guides Juan to the mud hole and then continues to guide him as his own journey begins. He leaves society behind him in search of happiness and a concrete goal. He does not speak much during his journey because he is trying to observe what is going on in the world outside the bus, and in doing so is trying to determine his relationship to nature. Steinbeck believes he can only find this knowledge through pain. Thus, the knowledge that people are indifferent to him hurts Juan. When he leaves the bus, he finds sanctuary in a nearby barn and while resting there, his Virgin shows him scenes of his past. In these scenes Juan was sometimes alone and sometimes with various faceless companions. But always he was in the midst of a natural setting and always he was happy just to be there.

The Virgin has shown Juan the truth through these scenes. The Virgin proves to Juan that he is a sensitive man and he must rely upon his sensitivity to bring him contentment. Through nature, Juan will be able to forget the callousness of his society and in nature his Virgin will be ubiquitous. First, however, he must fulfill his duty. He will return to the bus, and drive the people to San de la Cruz. Only then, after he has faced his pain (e.g., his society) and relieved himself of it, will he be able to face life on his own terms.

The Short Reign of Pippin IV

Although both The Wayward Bus and The Short Reign of Pippin IV have alienated heroes for their central characters, both novels are completely different in their character portrayals. There are two basic ways in which we can see these differences. First, The Wayward Bus is highly allegorical. Each of the characters represents a certain aspect of society and the journey of the bus is an allegory of moral man's escape from society's evils. In The Short Reign of Pippin IV there is less allegory or symbolism than in any other Steinbeck novel. As in The Wayward Bus, Steinbeck condemns an entire society, but in The Short Reign the condemned objects are presented in a direct and straightforward manner. Also, in The Wayward Bus, because the characters are allegorical Steinbeck takes a great deal of time portraying them. Juan Chicoy is the main character but his story is no more developed than that of Pimples Carson or Mildred Pritchard. The Short Reign of Pippin IV is almost exclusively about Pippin. Other characters appear only for the sake of educating Pippin and/or angering him.

At the beginning of the novel Pippin is not an admirable man. Actually he is the brunt of Steinbeck's satire. Steinbeck satirizes fad-mania in Pippin's daughter Clotilde, callous American tycoons in Tod Johnson, immorality in Uncle Charles, and pseudo-democracy in portraying the French government, but in the portrayal of Pippin, Steinbeck satirizes the apathy of twentieth-century man. At first, Pippin is thoroughly apathetic and he is punished for his apathy by being forced to become king. Steinbeck has created an absurd little man who has no convictions, just hobbies. Pippin is comfortable and secure with his telescope because the stars require nothing from him. Unfortunately, as Pippin sees it, when he becomes king, France does. Of course the government is perfectly willing, and definitely expects to relieve Pippin of all monarchial duties. Pippin, while relieved, is confused at the parties' eagerness. Why did they make him a leader and then allow him to remain a symbol? This naive question is a result of Pippin's former apathy, yet it signifies the change about to come.

After the parties relegate him to the position of a symbol--passive, safe, and secure, Pippin begins to wonder if he is carrying his reign in the proper fashion: "He said to himself in wonder and in fear, 'I am the king and I don't even know what a king is.' He read the stories of his ancestors. 'But they wanted to be kings,' he told himself. 'At least most of them did. And some of them wanted to be more. There I have it. If I could only find some sense of mission, of divinity of purpose'" (p. 73). Pippin decides that in order to be the king of France he must know the people and social conditions of France. He disguises himself with a mechanic's jumper and a false mustache. He applies for a job at the Citröen factory and spends all day talking to the workmen. In

addition to this, he goes through the slum district of the Left Bank pretending to be a building inspector. He is shocked at everything he sees and hears. When he tells Uncle Charles what he has done, his uncle realizes that King Pippin IV has begun to commit the irrevocable deed. The king is upsetting the status quo:

> "Oh my child," said Uncle Charlie. "My poor bewildered child. You are not going to fall into the old trap, are you? Study the British. When the present Duke of Windsor was king he went down into a coal mine just once and the resulting shock not only caused questions in Parliament but nearly lost the prime minister a vote of confidence. Pippin my dear, dear child, I order you to desist!"
>
> The king sat down in a little chair and it became a throne.
>
> "I did not ask to be king," he said, "but I am king and I find this dear, rich, productive France torn by selfish factions, fleeced by greedy promoters, deceived by parties. I find that there are six hundred ways of avoiding taxes if you are rich enough--sixty-five methods of raising rent in controlled rental areas. The riches of France, which should have some kind of distribution, are gobbled up. Everyone robs everyone, until a level is reached where there is nothing left to steal. No new houses are built and the old ones are falling to pieces. And on this favored land the maggots are feeding" (pp. 107-08).

Pippin is discovering that social injustices exist in his kingdom, and in doing so he is beginning to become alienated. Yet, at this stage he is basically no different from Uncle Charles or the Parliament party members. They all realize that France is essentially corrupt. The difference is that Pippin, in his discovery, is beginning his change from apathetic outsider to alienated hero. Uncle Charles knows that the prominent French leaders can only maintain their prominence by pretending to be ignorant. Pippin is no longer ignorant, but for the time being he is too overwhelmed with both his new position and his new knowledge to make waves in the status quo. Pippin is thoroughly dismayed, and whenever he has been in this condition he has turned to Uncle Charles for

advice. Uncle Charles now says that Pippin should mind his own business. Pippin wonders if the affairs of France are the king's business. Pippin IV is more confused than ever.

Now comes the novel's turning point. Pippin continues wandering around the French cities in an effort to prove to himself that his uncle is correct. He comes to the little town of Gambais and discovers a little man "feeling about in the reedy water of the moat with a long tined rake." The reader of Steinbeck will immediately recognize the old man as being in the tradition of Steinbeck's wise eccentrics (e.g., Merlin in Cup of Gold, the hermit in To A God Unknown, and the seer in Sweet Thursday) who often set examples for the main characters. The old man lives by a moat and pulls a statue out of the water continually pushed in by young trouble makers. Obviously Pippin does not desire to become a keeper of a moat, but the old man's explanation of why he performs this futile duty serves as a lesson for Pippin: "Why--I don't know. I guess there's people that pull things out--that's what they do. I guess I'm one of that kind." The man further explains by saying, "There's just people--just what people do" (p. 116). The language is simple and seemingly meaningless, but Pippin derives a profound meaning from the old man's explanation. Pippin sees that the old man has a task to fulfill but he suspects that the man had no choice. The old man does not enjoy the work but he does it because it is his job. Pippin immediately realizes the parallel between himself and the old man. This king did not want to be king. Yet he has the job and must do it properly whether he likes it or not. But still he does not know what "properly" means. Is Uncle Charles' conception of the king's duties proper? He decides to have another conversation with the old man.

The old man believes that the concept of "king" is just a dream. Pippin asks the man if there is any way that he could tell if there was a real king. The old man replies, "Well, he'd come riding down the crops on his horses--or there'd be trouble and he'd hang a lot of folks--or he'd say, maybe, 'There's a raft of bad things going on and I'm going to fix em'" (p. 122). Pippin hears this answer and sets his course. He now knows that a real king is not a passive tool. A real king is a leader and his country will prosper through his leadership. Pippin immediately calls his parliament together and sets forth his new policy. There are reforms to be made in taxes, wages, prices, housing, government, public health, insurance and land holdings. The irate king has committed the cardinal sin. He has expressed his ire.

At this point Pippin becomes Steinbeck's true alienated hero. His code of ethics is antithetical to that of established society. The government cannot tolerate a king who insists on expressing his opinions and so Pippin IV is dethroned. He retires to the place in society which he formerly held--that of an astronomer and family man. But this does not imply he has gone through a complete cycle. At the beginning of the novel Pippin was happy in his little world because that little world was all he knew or cared about. His experience as king has forced him to form opinions and make decisions based on those opinions. These decisions prove impotent because his society is unwilling to step out of its complacency. Pippin also was complacent, but as king he grew morally and matured intellectually. The public does not want to grow with its king and so the king must relinquish his throne. But Pippin refuses to relinquish his moral standards. And so he returns to isolation, but now as an unhappy man contemptuous of his society.

The Winter of Our Discontent

In 1961, four years after the appearance of The Short Reign of Pippin IV, Steinbeck published The Winter of Our Discontent. Like East of Eden, The Winter of Our Discontent deals with the problem of choosing between good and evil. Steinbeck, however, treats this problem differently in both novels. In East of Eden Steinbeck's emphasis is upon the nature of man in general. Adam, Aron, Tom, and Cal have to choose whether or not they want to become morally strong individuals. Steinbeck wanted to show that each individual must fight a psychological battle in determining the direction of his moral character. The struggle is within the individual, that is, between man and himself. There is little outside the individual pushing him one way or the other.

In The Winter of Our Discontent, the battle in which the individual tries to achieve moral fortitude is still present. However, in this novel the adversaries are the individual and his society. Society is corrupt and man is impressionable. Yet, although he is impressionable, his inclination is toward virtue. Where East of Eden tells us that man has the choice of being virtuous or not being virtuous, The Winter of Our Discontent examines the problem of whether or not man's inclination toward morality is more powerful than his desire to have his peers accept him. As Stanley Cooperman puts it, "the author's interest in moral drama becomes a profile of a moral nightmare: a world in which men no longer need to struggle against Evil because they have become the servants of Evil--and have done so, moreover, in the name of Virtue itself."[5] Ethan Hawley, the novel's central character, is living in a society that believes morality for its own sake is foolish. In this society, everything

that man does must be done for material gain. The man who believes that honor is more important than wealth cannot be respected.

At the beginning of the novel Ethan does not concern himself with the opinions of the New Baytown community. He feels that the Hawley name and the tradition that surrounds it automatically command respect from all who are familiar with New Baytown history. Feliciano Relgado believes that Ethan's preoccupation with his past signifies an inability to adapt to a society that refuses to live in the past.[6] Yet, it must be pointed out that Ethan's community is also steeped in tradition--the tradition of corruption: "New Baytown had slept for a long time. The men who governed it, politically, morally, economically, had so long continued that their ways were set. The Town Manager sold equipment to the township, and the judges fixed traffic tickets as they had for so long that they did not remember it as illegal practice--at least the books said it was. Being normal men, they surely did not consider it immoral" (p. 176).

Ethan is alienated from New Baytown society not because he refuses to change with the times, but because he abides by a different set of traditional values. Mr. Baker, New Baytown's exemplary citizen, also has a strong sense of family tradition, but the tradition of the Baker name parallels the fallen values of New Baytown. His father, Captain Baker, along with Ethan's father, had been partners in the ship the Belle Adair. Captain Baker burned the ship for the insurance money. New Baytown applauded Baker's "successful" fire, for they would have done the same thing in his place. The Winter of Our Discontent is the portrayal of the battle between Ethan and this so-called "normal" moral standard of New Baytown.

The story of Ethan Hawley is the story of a man gradually becoming the alienated hero. At first Ethan refuses to conform to New Baytown moral standards, not necessarily because he considers these standards immoral, but because he has a devotion to the purity of his ancestors' name. Eventually, however, he begins to conform because his family considers him a failure and New Baytown looks at his complacent acceptance of his menial job and thinks he is a fool. So, Ethan begins to cheat like all the rest of his fellow townsmen. He makes a deal with a supplier of groceries (Ethan is a clerk in a grocery store) so that he will get a kickback. He informs the Immigration Bureau that is employer has entered the country illegally. And finally, he plans to rob the bank.

The immediate assumption would be that Ethan wants to get rich quick. Certainly this is the intention of Ethan's prototype Mr. Hogan in Steinbeck's short story "How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank" (published in 1959, two years before The Winter of Our Discontent). In the story Mr. Hogan, also a grocery clerk, plans to rob the town bank. He carefully plots out the theft and at the end of the story he succeeds without the slightest difficulty. Steinbeck gives us little character development and rarely does he go into any of the characters' minds. Even Mr. Hogan shows little emotion. He wants to rob a bank, makes plans to accomplish the task, and does it. The difference between Mr. Hogan and Ethan Hawley is blatant. Hogan is sick of being a grocery store clerk, so he decides to do something about it. For Hogan the decision is easy because Hogan always had the moral standards of his community. Therefore, robbing a bank is as easy and as natural for him as sweeping out the grocery store after closing hours. But Steinbeck was not satisfied with Mr. Hogan

because Mr. Hogan was a caricature rather than a human being. The story had no dramatic conflict; Hogan wanted to do something, he found no obstacle, and so he did it.

Ethan, on the other hand, has a very significant obstacle: the thought of robbing a bank revolts him. On the one side there is the Ethan who wants to rob the bank. Obviously he does not want to let anyone know of his plans, so we can eliminate the possibility that he is trying to show the community that he is as shrewd as the rest. Yet, he does want to prove something to himself. The town has convinced him he is foolish to be so virtuous and now Ethan feels alienated. He wants to be a part of the New Baytown community. He believes that the robbery will place him in this position.

He even hopes that Margie Young--Hunt's tarot cards can combine with the stars to help him in his efforts to conform. He asks them to "incline me to a business cleverness I never had, to acquisitiveness foreign to me. Could I incline to want what I didn't want? There are the eaters and the eaten. That's a good rule to start with. Are the eaters more immoral than the eaten? In the end all are eaten--all gobbled up by the earth, even the fiercest and the most crafty" (p. 51). Obviously, Ethan is trying to rationalize immoral actions and near the end of his second stage it appears that this rationalizing is working: "It seems then, that it is not what you do, but how you do it and what you call it. Is there a check in man, deep in them, that stops or punishes? There doesn't seem to be. The only punishment is for failure. In effect no crime is committed unless a criminal is caught" (p. 201).

The important point to remember about Ethan's rationalizing is that he feels the need to rationalize. He is constantly trying to prove to

himself (to the part of that which tells him it is a crime to even think about attempting to commit one) that it is natural to be an occasional criminal. But while it is natural for the people of New Baytown it is not natural for Ethan Hawley. He tries to convince himself that robbing Baker's bank will prove that he is a normal human being. No longer will he feel alienated from his neighbors, but Ethan is now feeling a worse type of loneliness. He is alienated from himself. He begs the stars to "incline" him toward dishonesty because he feels he is not capable of directing himself toward dishonesty. His last speech before attempting the robbery displays his inner conflict reaching its highest point. As he is walking out the door he looks around the store and speaks to his groceries:

> "And I want to thank you all. We have been together, humble workers in the vineyard, and I a servant as you are. But now a change is coming. I will be master hereforth, but I promise I will be a good and kind master. The time approaches, my friends, the curtain rises--farewell." And as I moved out the front door with the broom, I heard my own voice cry, "Danny--Danny! Get out of my gate." A great shudder shook me so that I had to lean on the broom a moment before I opened up the doors (p. 235).

Danny, of course, is symbolic of Ethan's conscience. Ethan, behind a cynical facade, is laughing with his groceries in an attempt to minimize his self-loathing. But Danny the alcoholic, one time Ethan's best friend, is now dead. He has used Ethan's "cure" money to drink himself to death. The town has convinced Ethan that this was his motive all along for giving Danny the money. Danny's note saying "This is what you want Eth," indicated that he also believed this. With Danny dead, Taylor Meadow would belong to Ethan. Ethan does not want to believe this was the motive but the spirit of Danny will not remain dead. Danny has returned as Ethan's conscience to ask Him if guilt is so easy for Ethan to

accept, that robbing banks is normal practice. Ethan leaves the store hoping that he can put this question behind him. He has now decided to go ahead with his plan, but nevertheless his conscience is beginning to take hold. This fact becomes clear when we consider that as a grocery clerk he was content with his life, but as a man trying to fulfill the aspirations of the normal New Baytownsman he is miserable.

Ethan is interrupted in his attempt as a government agent comes to inform him that his employer has left him the store. Ethan's informing has paid off and the thought sickens him. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Baker returns from the state capitol expressing shock and sadness at the news that many of the town officials have been accused of corrupt activities. Ethan suspects that it was Baker who informed and the parallel between the two informers, Ethan and Baker, strengthens his self-contempt. Baker offers Ethan the job of Town Manager, since the current official now obviously must vacate it. With Baker's offer, Ethan realizes that he truly has become an exemplary citizen. Even Baker thinks that Ethan is corrupt enough to assume this important position. The final incident occurs when Ethan returns home one night to find a television lawyer wanting to speak with him. Allen has won the "I Love America" contest but the boy has plagiarized. The lawyer offers Ethan a college scholarship for Allen if he will keep the boy from mentioning anything about the contest. Ethan refuses the offer knowing that it is nothing more than a bribe. When he confronts Allen, he finds that the boy's only regret comes from the knowledge that he has been caught. Allen believes he has been a failure in doing what everyone else easily does. Ethan is horrified by his son's response. Completely overcome by his own sins and

the attitude of Allen, he decides that he is an anachronism not meant to live in modern society. He heads toward the waterfront with the intention of killing himself.

It is at this point that Ethan becomes the alienated hero. He reaches for the razor blades, finding instead the talisman that symbolizes the moral strength of his ancestors. At the same time he sees Ellen coming after him. Ethan now realizes that suicide is weakness and Ethan, fulfilling Steinbeck's role of the alienated hero, cannot be weak. In this suspended moment between life and death, he has acquired a new sense of pride. Even though the talisman is a catalyst for his new strength, Ethan is proud not merely because he is a Hawley. His source of pride comes from the knowledge that he has the strength to be the moral man in an immoral society. To Ethan the talisman is now a symbol of family honesty, not family respectability. Ethan steps out of the water, looking at Ellen and realizing, "I had to get back--had to return the talisman to its rightful new owner." Ethan has finally acquired the knowledge that the talisman holds and he has a responsibility to teach this knowledge to his family. Like Juan Chicoy and Pippin IV, Ethan will return to society but will isolate himself. In his isolation he will find happiness because being virtuous makes all men self-satisfied and self-sufficient.

Pascal Covici points out that "Hogan and Hawley exist as witnesses to the author's sense that we are all at least partially corrupt."[7] While this is true, the character of Ethan Hawley reveals something else. The last chapter of Warren French's John Steinbeck is entitled "Mr. Steinbeck Goes to Town." Although French does not deal with The Winter of Our Discontent, the principles in the chapter may be applied to it.

Steinbeck has left the group-organisms of California and has "come to town"; that is, he has studied an entire civilization. In his study he has discovered that one man will be lost in a mass unless he can distinguish himself by having the courage to act differently from that mass. We do not see what the future holds for Ethan Hawley. For that matter neither do we know what will happen to Juan Chicoy, Pippin IV, or Cal Trask. But we do know that each of these characters has acquired the knowledge that he is capable of acting in accordance with his own moral standards. We still cannot help but wonder if the alienated heroes of Steinbeck remain virtuous, maintaining their ability to resist temptations to relax their moral sense. While The Wayward Bus, The Short Reign of Pippin IV, and The Winter of Our Discontent may not specifically show us the future of their protagonists, these novels are still among Steinbeck's most satisfactory novels because in them he poses a problem that affects an entire culture. He writes in his inscription to The Winter of Our Discontent, "Readers seeking to identify the fictional people and places here described would do better to inspect their own communities and search their own hearts, for this book is about a large part of America today." Steinbeck's new America is corrupt, but Steinbeck's new American has the potential to make himself incorruptible.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Antonia Seixas, "John Steinbeck and the Non-teleological Bus," What's Doing on the Monterey Peninsula, Vol. I, No. 12 (March, 1947), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 279.

[2]If we recall certain Hemingway characters, we will find that Juan's similarity to the Hemingway code hero is striking, but this similarity is not a matter of mere coincidence. Lisca points out that in 1939 Steinbeck wrote a letter to Pascal Covici saying of Hemingway, "I'm convinced that in many ways he is the finest writer of our time." Lisca goes on to show how Hemingway was probably a major influence in the writing of To A God Unknown. But The Wayward Bus demonstrates Hemingway's influence on Steinbeck far more than To A God Unknown, or for that matter any novel that Steinbeck wrote. Juan resembles Wilson "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" in that both Juan and Wilson let themselves be seduced not because of their own sexual desires, but because they both see the seduction as a means for revenge against their employers. Juan is like Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises as both have a distrust of middle-class conversation. Like Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea, Juan must feel pain before he can find his relationship to nature.

[3]Frederick Bracher, "Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," The Pacific Spectator (Winter, 1948), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 187.

[4]Woodburn O. Ross, "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," College English (May, 1959), rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 213.

[5]Stanley Cooperman, The Major Works of John Steinbeck (New York: Monarch Press, 1964), p. 96.

[6]Feliciano Relgado, "John Steinbeck," Razon Y Fe, Vol. 168 (1963), p. 427.

[7]Pascal Covici, Intro. to The Portable Steinbeck (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. xxvi.

CHAPTER VII

WHY THE GROTESQUE?

Steinbeck's work displays a conglomeration of half-wits, monomaniacs, religious fanatics, hermits, derelicts, misanthropes, and the physically deformed. When we look at this collection of characters, we must wonder why he was so interested in grotesques. What is it in Steinbeck the man that makes him want to crowd his fiction with so many monstrosities? Is Steinbeck's sympathy for the grotesque actually an offshoot of self-pity? Indeed, there is a fascination that seems to be almost pathological. In Chapter Two, The Journal of a Novel helped us to determine why Steinbeck created characters like Cathy, Aron, Cal and Adam, and it also is helpful in interpreting the character of Ethan Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent. Each of these characters is a product of Steinbeck's desire to overcome what he considered to be his own basically evil nature. But The Journal does not tell us that Steinbeck saw himself in Lennie Small, Joseph Wayne, or Raymond Banks. Thus, it is our job to speculate on why Steinbeck created these bizarre characters.

Since Steinbeck was for the most part a recluse, and since he wrote little about himself or his work, it is difficult to determine what resides in his personality that makes him want to create grotesque characters. As The Journal reveals, Steinbeck has some inner conflict that he is not capable of resolving. Woodburn O. Ross conjectures that the conflict exists because Steinbeck "is a man of two worlds. As a believer of

the inductive scientific method he must record what he sees, he must write realistically. But as a man of powerful affections and intuitions he must reflect irrational attitudes which are justifiable only in terms of the desires of the human spirit. He is therefore at the same time brutal and tender, rational and irrational, concrete and abstract. His imagination provides for humanity a home in the universe which his senses do not perceive."[1] Let us consider, for a moment, Ross' statement "As a believer in the scientific method he must record what he sees. . . ." The little that Steinbeck writes about art would make us tend to agree with Ross, and thus the logical conclusion would be that Steinbeck writes about the grotesque because he sees the grotesque. In The Log From the Sea of Cortez and A Russian Journal, Steinbeck practically pontificates the creed of the detached observer and therefore it follows that the grotesques (as treated with sympathy as they are with contempt) are really characters that Steinbeck bases on personal experience. Yet, when we read about Joseph Wayne and his love for a rock, Tularecito and his need to find subterranean ancestors, and Lennie Small's monomania for soft things, it is hard to believe that Steinbeck knows and sees all those whom he portrays.

We must grant that there are certain works which exemplify Steinbeck's ability to write objectively. The meaning of objectivity, as far as Steinbeck is concerned, simply means that the author's style is similar to that of a newspaper reporter. He records events without ever making intrusive value judgments. Naturally these judgments still make themselves known just because the author chooses specific events and portrays a certain character in a certain light. But since Steinbeck does not editorialize, he is often able to create the illusion that he is a de-

tached observer. For example, in the novel In Dubious Battle, despite the fact that we see Mac and Jim as monsters and despite the fact that characters like Joy, London, and Sam are presented as mindless puppets of these monsters, the words and actions of these characters force the reader to come to his own conclusions. Granted, Steinbeck is there in the character of Doctor Burton, but Burton's function is merely to state Steinbeck's doctrines about scientific objectivity. There are several stories in The Long Valley that also demonstrate Steinbeck's ability to live up to his credo concerning "objectivity." "The Snake" simply records an incident in which a woman buys a snake, expresses fondness for it, and feeds it a rat. "Flight" traces the story of a Mexican country boy who goes to town, gets into a fight in which he commits a murder, tries to escape by fleeing to the mountains, and is finally shot by his pursuers. Although readers may be horrified by the transformation of Root in "The Raid," Steinbeck remains detached, unjudging. As in the novel In Dubious Battle Steinbeck simply depicts the circumstances surrounding an event. In the story, Dick and Root talk about the meeting, are beaten up by the vigilante committee, and are satisfied that they have helped the cause. We do not hate the raiders and we do not sympathize with Dick and Root because the author has successfully constructed the story so that the reader adopts the author's objective viewpoint. As we read about the event we may feel shock or disgust, but because of Steinbeck's objective writing, we feel that we are a part of the story's action and thus we are not capable of forming judgments on what we have experienced. Only after we complete the experience of reading the story (and have had time to reflect) can we form value judgments. In none of these cases does Steinbeck make an intrusive judgment for us.

Unfortunately, there are too many places where Steinbeck is far from objective, for when Steinbeck has feeling for his characters he often lets his subjectivity determine the direction of his art. For example, in To A God Unknown Steinbeck shows us various examples of religious fanaticism. At the same time however, he is tendentiously revealing his disapproval. In this case Steinbeck seems to want to punish those whom he condemns. As a result he saturates his novel with fantastic scenes which allow him to castigate his enemies. The Grapes of Wrath is another case in point. The migrants are the obvious heroes and the Grower's Association is the obvious villain. When Steinbeck is not idealizing his main characters--Tom, Ma Joad and Jim Casy--they are serving as his spokesmen. Despite Steinbeck's consistent idealizing, The Grapes of Wrath remains a great novel because Steinbeck is able to make us sympathize with the plight of the Joads and the rest of the migrants.

While it is undeniably true that Steinbeck does not at times maintain a scientific detachment, this does not mean that he fails to be "objective." For we must understand that Steinbeck's ideal of objectivity is not the same as that which a scientist practices in the laboratory. When he creates a Lennie, Tularecito, Pirate, or Frankie, he is creating distorted human beings, not amoebas. Thus, he must do more than just record their body functions--he must tell us about their thought processes. He is not a scientist but his desire to be objective is still present as he portrays these characters. If he is to be scientific, or at least true to his own credo, he must write about what he sees. But again we must observe that he obviously sees more than just grotesque people. So why are these the people whom he chooses to portary? Perhaps

the normal do not attract his attention because they are not close enough to the level of the marine-organism of the Sea of Cortez.

Some critics adhere to this theory. They feel that Steinbeck's grotesques are actually the result of a unity between the author's two major interests--people and biology. Frederick J. Hoffman believes that Steinbeck creates the grotesque simply because this is where his interest resides: "The idiots of Steinbeck's fiction are a case in point; there is no attempt to make us realize their idiocy in the perspective of a larger fictional strategy; instead we are reduced to a comparable subrational level of appreciation and sympathy."[2] Similarly, Edmund Wilson states, "Mr. Steinbeck does not give the effect, as Lawrence or Kipling does, of romantically raising the animals to the stature of human beings, but rather of assimilating the human beings to animals."[3] Wilson agrues that, "The chief subject of Mr. Steinbeck's fiction has been thus not those aspects of humanity in which it is most thoughtful, imaginative, constructive, nor even those aspects of animals that seem most attractive to humans, but rather the processes of life itself. In the ordinary course of nature, living organisms are continually being destroyed, and among the principal things that destroy are the predatory appetites and the competitive instincts that are necessary for the very survival of eating and breeding creatures."[4] Maxwell Geismar makes what is perhaps the most useful observation for understanding Steinbeck's motivation for creating his grotesques:

> What is the meaning of this line of mystic brutes? Do they, like monkeys, obscure but illuminating, perform in public what we consider in private, the materialization of our inner desires, a little more in evidence, perhaps, but no more queer? There are other possible significances, certainly, but there is little evidence that Steinbeck means them to be other than what they seem, and we are forced to conclude that, in terms of Steinbeck's past, Lennie and his brothers are again more

> theatrical than evocative. The peculiar, like the ordinary, is the legitimate province of the writer, but it is precisely his function to make it legitimate, to portray it for its illumination on the entire contest of human activity. As the writer on human oddities, Steinbeck, rather than meditating upon his creations, merely exhibits them.[5]

The statements of Hoffman, Wilson, and Geismar have one thing in common. They all express the belief that many of Steinbeck's grotesques are not only presented from a scientific point of view, they are presented from too much of a scientific point of view. The writer must present what he knows and he must portray things for which he has great feeling. Steinbeck knows people and he knows animals, but Steinbeck also knows science. The study of animals (and this includes microscopic organisms) can be accomplished by the scientific approach. But does this also apply to the study of people? Zola, Crane, or Gorki would certainly believe so but at the same time these authors would relate their observations to, as Hoffman puts it, "a larger fictional strategy." The objection is that Steinbeck "merely exhibits" his grotesques. We witness the whole of their life cycles through the author's microscope but when we take our eye from the lens, we fail to believe that what we have seen is significant. But turning again to Geismar's statement we find that this critic actually refutes his own objection. Steinbeck's grotesques are beings that do not necessarily come from his past, but come to us "in terms of Steinbeck's past." Despite the fact that Steinbeck has known the derelicts and the paisanos we cannot help wonder if he has known them as they appear in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat. Steinbeck has known many people, but are Joseph Wayne, John Battle, and Alice Chicoy representative of Steinbeck's acquaintances? We can hardly believe this to be the case, but we can believe that these characters are "the materialization of our inner desires." Let us take Geismar's observation one step further and

ask ourselves if Steinbeck's grotesques are not so much symbolic of general humanity as they are of Steinbeck himself.

Edward Wagenknecht writes, "If Steinbeck is anything, he is kind, yet there is an element of sadism in his work, and violence and degradations often seem to fascinate him for their own sake."[6] Wagenknecht, like Ross, is suggesting that Steinbeck has a multi-faceted personality. Ross sees Steinbeck as being an observer of science and at the same time being an almost romantic individualist. His major artistic problem is trying to reconcile his inherent love for humanity with his need to see human beings as biological organisms. Accordingly, Wagenknecht believes that Steinbeck's clinical interest in the sub-normal individual runs counter to his love of humanity. If we invert Wagenknecht's statement into question form we could have, "How could someone so fascinated by sadism, violence, and degradation be so kind at the same time?" Burton Rascoe has a partial answer to this question: "He [Steinbeck] said that he was mortally afraid of hate and that he never wanted to hate anyone or have anyone hate him--very much. The only defense against concentrated hate, he said, was immediate surrender, capitulation; and this must take the form of humility, benevolence, friendliness. The only way to combat hate is to remove from within yourself the reasons for this hate; only thus can you disarm the one that hates you; only thus can you render the terrible force of his hatred impotent."[7] What is implied here is the kind of soul searching which we find in The Journal of a Novel. Thus Rascoe seems to resolve the contradiction seen by both Ross and Wagenknecht.

Steinbeck is not writing about what he sees in his environment. His grotesques are products of what he feels in his soul. Steinbeck's attempt at objectivity on one level is very successful as is witnessed by works

like In Dubious Battle and "The Snake." But when we come to The Journal and East of Eden, we find the word "monster" and we may legitimately question the "scientific" origin of such a term. Steinbeck, as Rascoe points out, does not want to be hated. But it is not humanity that Steinbeck fears, it is Steinbeck himself. The lurid desires, the irresponsibility, the egocentricity, combine to form the monster; the grotesque that Steinbeck must change to "humility," "benevolence," "friendliness." The change must take place so Steinbeck will not hate himself. Peter Lisca entitles his book The Wide World of John Steinbeck. Perhaps a better title would be "The Wide World in John Steinbeck" for almost all of Steinbeck's fiction can be seen as an attempt of the author to come to terms with impulses, emotions, distortions within Steinbeck himself. If we see "mere exhibition" it could be that the exhibits are too esoteric for anyone other than the exhibitor. Steinbeck is putting a part of his grotesque monster on paper. He is examining it through a very subjective eye and hoping his study will reveal something that will help to obviate self-loathing. When F. W. Watt says, "in keeping with Steinbeck's cynical view of human society, most of Steinbeck's sympathetic characters are social failures: they may survive, but they do not succeed,"[8] we can superimpose "cynical view of himself" and perhaps be more accurate. In an article addressed to his disparagers, "Critics, Critics Burning Bright," Steinbeck wrote, "I have had fun with my work and I shall insist on continuing to have fun with it. And it has been my good fortune in the past, and I hope it will be in the future, to find enough people to go along with me so that I may eat and continue to have fun."[9] It would be absurd to suggest that Steinbeck is contemptuous of public response to his writing. Yet, at the same time, as the above passage

suggests, Steinbeck believes his first obligation in writing is to himself. While the word "fun" may be misleading, we can assume that Steinbeck does satisfy himself when he exorcises his inner demons. It would be hard to term this exorcism "fun" but nevertheless Steinbeck is only content after he inspects, castigates, and ultimately reveals to himself, through his fiction, the grotesque nature of his own personality.

If Steinbeck is writing, primarily, for the purpose of self-analysis or self-revelation, does this purpose apply to all of his works? When we consider a work like The Grapes of Wrath, it may seem hard to see how Steinbeck is presenting us with self-portrayal. Nevertheless, if we examine the work closely, we will see that Steinbeck the man is very much a part of the novel. Since he has a message to convey to the world, his social opinions form the basis for the work. But even in this almost "proletarian" novel, Steinbeck's inner-exploration is evident. The Steinbeck alter-ego in The Grapes of Wrath is Jim Casy. On one level, the level in which Steinbeck wants to give his social message, Casy is the promulgator of the group-man theory. But on the psychological level (e.g., the level on which Steinbeck is examining his own personality) Casy is constantly undergoing a process of self-evaluation. We can see this psychological emphasis on Casy when we consider his trip in the wilderness and his sojourn in jail. While he is isolated in these two environments he is able to form his new philosophy. But why does Casy feel the need to form a new philosophy? Ostensibly, Casy is dissatisfied with his old religious attitudes, but there is something other than religion that pushes him into the wilderness. To put it simply, Steinbeck's "monster" becomes Casy's guilt. We can recall that Steinbeck felt that he was evil because of licentious thoughts. In The Grapes of Wrath, Casy was

dissatisfied with himself for seducing young girls. Casy, like Steinbeck, feels isolated from others because of his inability to justify his actions. His new philosophy says that the action of Jim Casy must be harmonious with the desires of others. This is also what Steinbeck believes is the way to rid himself of his evil nature.

At this time it must be pointed out that, with the exception of those which appear in The Journal of a Novel, Steinbeck's letters have never been published. They are not available to the public and only those who knew Steinbeck were able to gain access to these letters. The point is that since we know little about Steinbeck the man, the conclusion that his grotesques are self-portraits can only be conjectural. Not only did Steinbeck refuse to have his letters published, but he also refused to say anything about his own work. Lewis Gannett records Steinbeck's reaction after Of Mice and Men was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club. Gannett writes that Alexander Woollcott, a journalist and broadcaster, asked Steinbeck for material that he could use in a broadcast. Woollcott's agents presented Steinbeck with the request to which he replied,

> I think you know my hatred of personal matter. I hope you will get some of the impression over to Mr. Woollcott. On the other hand I should like to have him talk about the work. Factual material doesn't matter, but tell him, please no personalities. I simply can't write books if a consciousness of self is thrust on me. Must have my anonymity . . . unless I can stand in a crowd without self-consciousness and watch things from an uneditorialized point of view, I'm going to have a hell of a hard time. I'm sure Mr. Woollcott will understand this. I'm sure that of his own experience he will know the pressures exerted by publicity are unendurable.[10]

Frank Scully interviewed Steinbeck at about the same time. Scully writes that after Steinbeck became famous he was hounded by many profile seekers, "And he was very much irritated when the doting public climbed fondly

into his chair and combed his hair for autographs."[11] Nevertheless, because Scully was able to convince Steinbeck that the only purpose of the interview was to find out what the author thought about himself, Steinbeck consented. During the meeting he was amazed at the shyness and reticence of his subject:

> This was what lay behind the padlock of the Steinbeck gates. Immersed in thought most of the time, the author-owner proved a vague and quiet conversationalist. His wife, a vivacious, understanding, witty personality, ran interference for him.
>
> His fear of fame was expressed in "Everything the people admire, it destroys. It imposes a personality on him it thinks he should have. And whether that personality fits him or not, it doesn't seem to matter. There are two John Steinbecks in America now. One is me, and the other is the guy the public has created out of its own imagination, and thinks ought to be me. I don't like that last fellow."
>
> His retreat into solitude had not been due to fear or idiosyncrasy. It has been a flight from a public that would destroy him spiritually. Eager to lionize him, it insisted that he bring his popular self to all sorts of public gatherings.

We have before us the theory that Steinbeck wants to keep to himself so he can keep his real personality, as Scully puts it, "spiritually" sound. This reasoning must be examined. Is Steinbeck's solitude and need for anonymity a kind of romantic escape from the impure crowd, or is Steinbeck trying to hide the fear or idiosyncrasy that Scully is sure does not exist? Steinbeck says, "I don't like that last fellow" but does Steinbeck like the first fellow? Let us first examine what he finds wrong with his public image. Always the recluse, always the mystery man, the public can only have one image of him--Steinbeck the success. The public only sees him in this light and they want to bring him into the open to find out what it is like to be a sudden celebrity basking in the glory of fame and fortune. If we recall the previous chapter and the discussion on The Winter of Our Discontent, we can imagine why this

"last fellow" sickens Steinbeck. The author looks at monetary success in the same way that Ethan Hawley regards it. Both Steinbeck and Hawley feel that being rich is often synonymous with being corrupt. Steinbeck shows that he had no desire to make a lot of money. In a previously quoted passage Steinbeck claimed that he hoped his work would provide him with just enough money so that he could eat and continue to work. Of Mice and Men did much more than that. It made him an idol, not because of his name, not because of his ideals, and not because of his talent. Steinbeck became an idol and he became respected because, as Steinbeck saw it, the public always idolizes and respects those who have become rich. Steinbeck did not object to being admired, but he could not stand to be admired and exposed for the wrong reasons.

But what about the right reasons? If, as Rascoe suggests, Steinbeck had a great fear of being hated, this would imply that he wanted to be admired as an artist and as a human being. If we are to examine the grotesque within the mind of Steinbeck we should speculate on what Steinbeck thought of himself as an artist. Of Steinbeck's rare magazine articles we find that two were written in answer to his disparagers. "Critics, Critics Burning Bright" and "Critics From a Writer's Point of View" reveal that Steinbeck was anything but impervious to criticism. Steinbeck is so defensive that he goes as far as to attack critics for not being able to separate their personal idiosyncrasies from their profession. At one point in the latter article he shows how the hostile critic is actually a practitioner of displacement: "One might go further into the effects of personal life on criticism. It is reasonable to suppose that the reviewer privately unloved will take a dim view of love; that the childlike critic will be intolerant of children; that the failure will

hate success; a bachelor be cynical of marriage; the tired and old find youth and enthusiasm intolerable; and the conservative be outraged by experiment."[13] This passage is revealing. Steinbeck has himself taken the role of critic and also of psychoanalyst. He tells us that the critic who attacks a work subjectively is a bad critic. But more important he implies that the insecure will dislike the secure. Steinbeck has found that the accusation is holy just by virtue of its having been made. The critics, secure in this holiness, have condemned Steinbeck. They have relegated him to the position of "hack writer" who writes for money's sake and Steinbeck desperately wants to disbelieve this. And so he counterattacks. Unfortunately this does not alleviate the hurt or eradicate the self-doubt.

This brings us to a final question. Does Steinbeck believe that he is admirable as a human being? The Journal would indicate he could only hate, never admire himself. But The Journal suggests that Steinbeck felt that he was admirable just by virtue of attempting to expose his "monster." The Journal of a Novel may be only one work, yet its confessional nature makes it extremely relevant. In "Critics From a Writer's Point of View" Steinbeck writes, "Here is a thing we are most likely to forget. A man's writing is himself. A kind man writes kindly. A mean man writes meanly. A sick man writes sickly. And a wise man writes wisely."[14] To this we must add "A grotesque man writes grotesquely." The man who created Lennie, Tularecito, Peter Randall, Willie Romas, and Pimples Carson was not the scientific man writing scientifically. He was the unhappy man, unhappy because he saw a grotesqueness in his own personality that had to be purged if he was to have any self-respect.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Woodburn O. Ross, "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," Studies in Honor of A. H. R. Fairchild 1946, rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 178.

[2]Frederick J. Hoffman, The Modern Novel In America (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), pp. 149-150.

[3]Edmund Wilson, Classics and Commercials (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Young, 1950), p. 37.

[4]Wilson, p. 38. It must be pointed out that Wilson admits that he has not read all of Steinbeck's work. His reading has mostly been in the early novels and the short stories contained in The Long Valley.

[5]Maxwell Geismar, Writers In Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), p. 253.

[6]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), p. 446.

[7]Burton Rascoe, "John Steinbeck," first published in The English Journal, March, 1938, rpt. in E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 65.

[8]F. W. Watt, John Steinbeck (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1962), p. 17.

[9]John Steinbeck, "Critics, Critics Burning Bright," Saturday Review, Vol. 33, 11 November 1950, pp. 20-21.

[10]Lewis Gannett, "John Steinbeck's Way of Writing," The Portable Steinbeck (Viking Press, 1946), rpt. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: Univ. New Mexico Press, 1951), p. 28.

[11]Frank Scully, Rogues Gallery: Profiles of My Eminent Contemporaries (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1943), pp. 37-55.

[12]Scully, p. 50.

[13]John Steinbeck, "Critics From A Writer's Point of View," Saturday Review, Vol. 38, 27 August 1955, p. 20.

[14]Ibid.

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