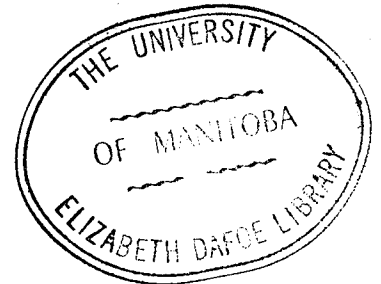


FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM IN THE WRITINGS
OF JOHN STEINBECK:
HIS MORAL VISION

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ABSTRACT

John Steinbeck's East of Eden, published in 1952, can be described as a thesis novel dealing with the theme of free will and moral responsibility. It is the purpose of the thesis submitted herewith to show the extent to which this theme is implicit in Steinbeck's previous novels. This literary Weltanschauung is contrasted to the "philosophic" view that Steinbeck calls "non-teleological thinking" in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, and which will be shown to be a philosophically unwarranted and sentimental pessimism or literary "determinism", and not the objective, philosophic view that Steinbeck claims it to be.

The first chapter of the thesis constitutes an analysis of Steinbeck's so-called "non-teleological" philosophic theory as it is found in The Log from the Sea of Cortez. Subsequent chapters deal with specific novels: Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, Cannery Row, The Pearl, and The Wayward Bus. It is not the purpose of the thesis to examine all of these novels in detail, for this has been done before. Peter Lisca's The Wide World of John Steinbeck is the first comprehensive study of the Steinbeck canon, and his analyses -- along with further insights gleaned from Warren French's John Steinbeck -- often are taken as a point of departure in the present paper. Other Steinbeck criticism has been consulted in the preparation of this paper, but it has been found that criticism before Lisca's work was fragment-

ary and lacking in a comprehensive understanding of the literary thought of Steinbeck, and that studies done subsequent to the publishing of Lisca's and French's books -- Fontenrose's John Steinbeck, for example -- either repeat work already done, or analyze Steinbeck's writings from a specialist's point of view -- as in Fontenrose's "mythological" approach.

Some of the analyses included in the thesis, however, are fairly lengthy -- that of Tortilla Flat, for example. This was found to be necessary where particular aspects of the novels had been found to be somewhat neglected by critics. Freudianism, for example, is an aspect of Steinbeck's literary thought which has not been dealt with adequately, especially with respect to Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, and The Wayward Bus. The indulgence of the reader of the thesis is requested in the examination of what might first appear to be over-long or irrelevant analyses of these novels. That Freudian thought is relevant to the theme of free will and determinism is shown -- to the reader's satisfaction, it is hoped -- wherever such justification seemed necessary.

On the other hand, the chapter on In Dubious Battle is quite short. It was felt that this novel had been dealt with adequately by Peter Lisca and Warren French so that only a comment on the theme of free will and determinism was necessary.

The results of this study of Steinbeck's understanding of the extent to which man is free and the extent to which he is determined may be summarized as follows: His early writings, from Tortilla Flat on, show both an instinctive understanding of practical freedom and moral responsibility, and a grasp of the irrational and compulsive drives of man. His attempts at philosophical speculation in The Log from the Sea of Cortez reveal an attitude of sentimental pessimism, spurious "determinism", and an assumed "non-blaming" attitude which he thinks of as objectivity. His short novel, The Pearl, reveals a strained attitude of refusal to blame characters deliberately depicted as melodramatic villains, on the basis of the belief that these men are merely carrying out their assigned duties, or acting out their given roles. The Wayward Bus, the last novel dealt with in some detail in the thesis, re-establishes Steinbeck's understanding of the nature of moral responsibility, but it also reveals Steinbeck's profound pessimism regarding the possibilities of achieving happiness or fulfillment in American society. Finally, Peter Lisca's assessment of the failure of Steinbeck's thesis novel on the theme of free will, East of Eden, is cited and agreed with, and Warren French's opinion that Steinbeck's more recent fiction has proved inferior to his writings of the 'thirties is assented to.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1952, John Steinbeck published the novel East of Eden in which he "went on...to insist at great length that every man has the power to choose between good and evil."¹ Actually, the theme of free will and determinism is implicit in most of Steinbeck's previous fiction, beginning with Cup of Gold (1929), and it can provide a perspective for examining the moral vision of the author, in its various stages of development from 1929 to 1952.

Although this paper will be concerned predominantly with this philosophic theme, nevertheless, other aspects of Steinbeck's writing which have ramifications relevant to free will and determinism will be dealt with to some extent. A kind of preoccupation with Freudian concepts, for example, is important in Steinbeck's thought, especially with respect to themes in Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, and The Wayward Bus. Because it has not been dealt with sufficiently in Steinbeck criticism, it will be examined in some detail. Freudianism is relevant to the question of free will; for example, to the extent that individuals are unaware of their subconscious motivations they tend to be incapable of making responsible choices, free of rationalization.

Another aspect of Steinbeck's writing relevant to the theme of free will is his structural technique in such novels

¹Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p.261.

as Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row; inasmuch as Steinbeck is a "non-teleological thinker", he is unwilling to foster the illusions of simple causes and a manifest final purpose in life by over-structuring his novels. Yet another aesthetic aspect relevant to the philosophic theme is the tone of Steinbeck's novels: Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, novels which illustrate the compulsive power of subconscious morbid motivations yet which also recognize the positive value of simple fun and enjoyment are tragicomedies; The Grapes of Wrath, which illustrates Steinbeck's profound moral awareness, is both morally excoriating and uplifting in tone; The Pearl, which denies Steinbeck's previous moral insights, is annoyingly sentimental in tone.

Although several critical works on Steinbeck, listed in the bibliography, were consulted in the preparation of this paper, Peter Lisca's The Wide World of John Steinbeck, the first major critical study of the Steinbeck canon, and Warren French's John Steinbeck, another comprehensive work, provide a foundation upon which the present thesis is built.

This paper, then, will deal with, first, Steinbeck's explicit philosophic point of view expressed in The Log from the Sea of Cortez. Secondly, Tortilla Flat will be analyzed and its Freudian aspects related to the theme of free will and determinism. Next, In Dubious Battle will be discussed briefly. Of Mice and Men will then be analyzed as a Freudian allegory. The moral vision of The Grapes of Wrath will be

discussed after that. Next, the tragicomic Cannery Row will be examined, and the life of human awareness and responsibility, as depicted in the character of Doc, will be seen. The defects in the moral vision of The Pearl will then be exposed, and, finally, the morally aware but cynically limited view of American life in The Wayward Bus will be examined.

CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHIC PROBLEM: THE SEA OF CORTEZ

Free will versus determinism has always been a knotty problem for philosophy at its most analytic level. For example, after many years of profound thinking, Kant concluded that man is "phenomenally" determined¹ but "noumenally" free, and that, in order to be morally good, he ought to act "as if" he were free. Today's student of philosophy does not approach such traditional problems hoping to "solve" them, but merely to understand what the concepts are, and what the words "free" and "determined" mean.

Free will is related to the concept of causality, which is itself an idea possessing no objective validity and incapable of verification, according to Hume, or a fundamental concept in terms of which the human mind orders all experience, according to Kant. Further, a distinction must be made between efficient or mechanistic causes, on the one hand, and final or teleological causes, on the other. An event "a" is the mechanistic cause of an event "b" if and only if whenever an event exactly like "a" occurs then it must be followed by an event exactly like "b". An event "a" is the teleological cause of an event "b" if and only if "a" is the purpose or end towards which the event "b" is inevitably directed.

¹By this Kant meant that from the point of view of "theoretical reason" man is determined. Kant dealt with ethics from the point of view of "practical reason", according to which man must be free.

The problem of free will is generated either by taking the concept of causality to its extreme or by denying it absolutely. If every event is mechanistically caused, so the argument runs, then free will is an illusion, for whenever we feel, psychologically, that we have exerted our free will, analysis by one who was omniscient would reveal how our apparently free decision was definitely caused by certain factors--including, of course, our personalities, experiences, knowledge and intelligence, which were, in turn, caused. If every event is teleologically caused, then free will is an illusion, for no matter how we exert our will to prevent it, the inevitable end will come about. On the other hand, if there is no causality, then free will is an illusion, for whenever we wish to exert our will, we are actually trying to cause something to happen, and if there is no causality, then, of course, we cannot do this.

In fiction as in everyday life, however, the problem of free will is never encountered in the reductio ad absurdum forms described above. Whether a person has thought about the philosophical problem of free will or not, he may act as if he is free, on the one hand, or he may act pessimistically or irresponsibly on the other hand. In East of Eden, for example, Caleb Trask finds out that Cathy is his mother, and that he has a tendency to adopt her attitude towards life. He then experiences a conflict in his own

mind, and finally, through an effort of will, he rejects his mother's attitude. On the philosophical level, it could still be argued that Caleb's decision was determined; that if all factors were known, including all psychological factors and their causes, his exertion of free will was illusory; that his inherited psychical make-up and his experience were the cause of his "decision". But this is irrelevant for an actual person in Caleb's position. Caleb has, in fact, made what in ordinary language is called a free will decision, and has rejected the "deterministic" rationalization that he has inherited his mother's fate. Practically speaking, as far as anyone knows, he could have acted otherwise.

Another example from Steinbeck's works is provided by The Pearl. When Kino throws the pearl back into the sea, he is making what is ordinarily considered a free will decision. The reader might sympathize with his decision or not, but the responsibility for such an act is clear. It is confusing for someone who sympathizes with such a decision to say, "He had to do it; he had no choice; social circumstances are such that the poor and uneducated are always exploited by the rich and powerful; that is the way it is; no blame is to be affixed; we must accept the inevitable; Kino's act was determined"; for this invites confusion with the philosophic concept of determinism whereby it would be said that Kino's action in retaining the pearl and attempt-

ing again to travel to a free market to sell it--if he had done that--would be considered "determined" just as much as his actual decision to throw it away was determined. From the philosophic point of view (if one is a philosophical determinist), all acts which have occurred have been determined, and all acts which will occur will be determined; it is only lack of knowledge which prevents us from predicting future events. But this philosophic determinism is merely the result of the analysis of a concept, causality. It is very different from determinism as a psychological attitude, a rationalization to justify evasion of responsibility, or as a literary Weltanschauung, the imaginary world of a Thomas Hardy, say. It is, in fact, impossible for anyone to know everything, and in Kino's case, alternatives to his decision can easily be conceived which are not known to be doomed to failure.

It is the major purpose of this paper to discover to what extent Steinbeck's literary Weltanschauung is deterministic, and this can be done only by examining his fiction. Before that is done, however, Steinbeck's attempt at philosophical speculation in The Sea of Cortez will be examined.²

Steinbeck describes his philosophic approach as follows:

We discussed intellectual methods and approaches,
and we thought that through inspection of thinking

²John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (New York: Viking, 1951), pp.131-151 et passim.

technique a kind of purity of approach might be consciously achieved--that non-teleological or 'is' thinking might be substituted in part for the usual cause-effect methods.³

As a matter of fact there are three distinct types of thinking, two of them teleological. Physical teleology, the type we have been considering, is by far the commonest today. Spiritual teleology is rare. Formerly predominant, it now occurs meta-physically and in most religions, especially as they are popularly understood (but not, we suspect, as they were originally enunciated or as they may still be known to the truly adept).⁴

Steinbeck's usage of the term "teleological" is incorrect. What he calls "the usual cause-effect methods", or "physical teleology" is not teleology at all, but is mechanistic or efficient causality. Steinbeck's locution, "spiritual teleology", though loose, is acceptable. He seems to intend this term to apply to such religious beliefs as Calvinistic predestination and Methodist optimism. Thus Steinbeck rejects both mechanistic causality and the teleological belief that man's life has meaning in terms of some religious end or purpose.

To illustrate his rejection of "the usual cause-effect methods", i.e. mechanistic causality, Steinbeck chooses an example from the depression of the nineteen-thirties. He says that superficial "cause-effect" thinkers claimed that the reason for the plight of the many destitute people of that time lay in their own shiftlessness and negligence.

³Sea of Cortez, pp.131-132.

⁴Ibid., p.139.

Steinbeck denies this, and asserts that "at that time there was work for only about seventy percent of the total employable population, leaving the remainder as government wards."⁵ He concludes that more initiative on the part of a particular unemployed person could result only in his taking the job of someone else and relegating him to the ranks of the unemployed.

Steinbeck recommends what he incorrectly calls the "non-teleological" attitude, which "has no bearing on what might be or could be if so-and-so happened," and which "merely considers conditions 'as is'."⁶ This so-called "non-teleological" attitude is clearly a kind of pessimism, fatalism, or non-philosophic determinism. A philosophic determinist would not assume as given that this "seventy-thirty ration will remain... 'because' natural conditions are what they are"⁷; to assume this is merely sentimental pessimism. A philosophic determinist would say that if one were omniscient he could know what must happen by projecting the causal chain into the future.

Steinbeck rightly criticizes persons who assign the wrong cause to an event--in this case the alleged shiftlessness of the unemployed--but his conclusions that there was no cause of the depression conditions and that there could be no remedy are invalid. In fact, remedies were applied, and, under the direction of President Roosevelt, the

⁵Sea of Cortez, p.132.

⁶Loc.cit.

⁷Ibid., p.133.

"seventy-thirty ratio" was changed by creating jobs for the unemployed, thereby stimulating the economy.

Steinbeck derides "spiritual teleology" or religious optimism in the following passage:

It is amazing how the strictures of the old teleologies infect our observation, causal thinking warped by hope....For hope implies a change from a present bad condition to a future better one....And the feeders of hope, economic and religious, have from these simple strivings of dissatisfaction managed to create a world picture which is very hard to escape. Man grows toward perfection; animals grow toward man; bad grows toward good; and down toward up, until our little mechanism hope, achieved in ourselves probably to cushion the shock of thought, manages to warp our whole world. Probably when our species developed the trick of memory and with it the counterbalancing projection called "the future", this shock-absorber, hope, had to be included in the series, else the species would have destroyed itself in despair. For if ever any man were deeply and unconsciously sure that his future would be no better than his past, he might deeply wish to cease to live....To most men the most hateful statement possible is, "A thing is because it is."⁸

Steinbeck obviously is not describing objectively a simple "diagnostic human trait," but is directing a tirade of invective against optimism, scorning that which he, no doubt, would most like to believe, instead of discussing the issue disinterestedly. An objective, critical, philosophic approach would point out that man does not know whether his future will be better or worse than his past. Ignorance of the future is not enough to drive the species to self-destruction. There is no way that man can be consciously sure of a wretched future any more than of a better future.

⁸Sea of Cortez, p.86.

When Steinbeck speaks of a man being "deeply and unconsciously sure that his future would be no better than his past," and of deeply wishing "to cease to live," he is displaying an unwarranted attitude of pessimism. If Steinbeck wished to objectively discuss man's unconscious fatalism and pessimism, he might have entered into a discussion of something like the Freudian death wish, but he clearly is not being objective here.

Steinbeck raises a valid objection to the misuse of causal thinking, viz., that a person who has discovered one causal factor is wrong in closing his mind to the possibility of other causal factors:

But the greatest fallacy in, or rather the greatest objection to, teleological thinking is in connection with the emotional content, the belief. People get to believing and even to professing the apparent answers thus arrived at, suffering mental constrictions by emotionally closing their minds to any of the further and possibly opposite "answers" which might otherwise be unearthed by honest effort--answers which, if faced realistically, would give rise to a struggle and to a possible rebirth which might place the whole problem in a new and more significant light.⁹

This is a valid objection to one misuse of causal thinking, but it is not a valid objection to causal thinking itself.

Steinbeck attacks causal thinking partly because he thinks that it is inconsistent with a kind of Hegelian or Oriental total view of the universe which he nurtures in

⁹Sea of Cortez, p.143.

his own mind:

The factors we have been considering as "answers" seem to be merely symbols or indices, relational aspects of things--of which they are integral parts--not to be considered in terms of causes and effects. The truest reason for anything's being so is that it is....Anything less than the whole forms part of the picture only, and the infinite whole is unknowable except by being it, by living into it.

.....
This deep underlying pattern inferred by non-teleological thinking crops up everywhere--a relational thing, surely, relating opposing factors on different levels, as reality and potential are related. But it must not be considered as causative, it simply exists, it is, things are merely expressions of it as it is expressions of them. And they are it, also....

The whole is necessarily everything, the whole world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective life and death, macrocosm and microcosm..., conscious and unconscious, subject and object. The whole picture is portrayed by is, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of being.¹⁰

The reader wants to know, of course, just what it is about causality that Steinbeck thinks conflicts with his theory of "the whole", and how his "relational aspects" adequately account for facts usually explained by causality and yet do not produce the conflicts he thinks causality does.

If one takes the trouble to wade through Steinbeck's pompous, pseudo-philosophic verbiage it is possible to discern what he is trying to say. The following passage, for example, provides a clue:

Frequently, however, a truly definitive answer seems to arise through teleological methods. Part of this is due to wish-fulfillment delusion. When

¹⁰Sea of Cortez, pp.148-151.

a person asks "Why?" in a given situation, he usually deeply expects, and in many cases receives, only a relational answer in place of the definitive "because" which he thinks he wants. But he customarily accepts the actually relational answer (it couldn't be anything else unless it comprised the whole, which is unknowable except by "living into") as a definitive "because". Wishful thinking probably fosters that error, since everyone continually searches for absolutisms (hence the value placed on diamonds, the most permanent physical things in the world) and imagines continually that he finds them. More justly, the relational picture should be regarded only as a glimpse--a challenge to consider also the rest of the relations as they are available--to envision the whole picture as well as can be done with given abilities and data. But one accepts it instead of a real "because," considers it settled, and, having named it, loses interest and goes on to something else.¹¹

What Steinbeck objects to in calling something a "cause" is that a person might assume that once a causal factor is named, no more thought need be directed to the situation. He assumes that one's thinking in terms of causality implies that one regards all causes as simple and absolute. Steinbeck rightly perceives that the naïveté of his hypothetical person would render him incapable of fully understanding a subject like biology, say, or sociology, for in these fields visible events are caused by a plethora of conditions, each of which might be necessary, and forwarded by many more conditions which are not necessary but expedient.

Steinbeck equates his "non-teleological" or "is" picture to the statistical approach,¹² which, of course, is

¹¹Sea of Cortez, pp.141-142.

¹²Sea of Cortez, p.137.

used by biologists and sociologists. The statistical approach, however, is employed by scientists within the context of an assumed causality. If there is a high coefficient of correlation between factors "a" and "b", and if whenever "a" is removed, "b" is prevented, then "a" may legitimately be called a cause of "b"; i.e., "a" is necessary to the occurrence of "b". If there is a high coefficient of correlation between "a" and "b", but the removal of "a" does not diminish the occurrence of "b", then the scientist looks for something else which causes both "a" and "b". If there is a high coefficient of correlation between "a" and "b", and the removal of "a" diminishes but does not absolutely prevent the occurrence of "b", then "a" would be regarded as a factor expedient but not necessary to the occurrence of "b".

Steinbeck is justified in objecting to his hypothetical naïve observer of cause and effect who considers the problem settled when one causal factor or "answer" has been found. But scientists who assume causality are aware that a single causal factor may be, on the one hand, necessary but not sufficient, or, on the other hand, sufficient but not necessary to bring about an event. Steinbeck achieves nothing by abandoning the legitimate terminology of causality for his vague "relational factors".

To expose weaknesses in Steinbeck's attempts at philo-

sophic analysis is beside the point, it might be argued, for his reputation rests on his fiction, not his philosophizing; his "non-teleological thinking" is more important as an attitude than as an "intellectual method". This objection, however, can be met.

A paramount aspect of Steinbeck's "non-teleological thinking" as an attitude is his belief that one ought not to blame others for their actions. Steinbeck equates rational objectivity with a refusal to blame. He says that

Non-teleological ideas...consider...conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all-important prerequisite. Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be... but rather with what actually 'is'....¹³

Steinbeck cites as an example the incident of a nervous woman with a somewhat irrational fear of burglars, who appealed to the Steinbecks, her neighbours, for a promise of aid in the event of an intrusion in the night. Instead of blaming her, Steinbeck says he comforted her, in a way which a "teleological thinker" could not:

...Teleological treatment which one might have been tempted to employ under the circumstances would first have stressed the fact that the fear was foolish-- would say with a great show of objective justice, "Well, there's no use in our doing anything; the fault is that your fear is foolish and improbable. Get over that." (as a judge would say, "Come into court with clean hands"); "then if there's anything sensible we can do, we'll see," with smug blame implied in every word....
.....

¹³Sea of Cortez, p.135.

Incidentally, there is in this connection a remarkable etiological similarity to be noted between cause in thinking and blame in feeling.... The non-teleological picture...is the larger one that goes beyond blame or cause....¹⁴

Steinbeck's sympathy for the poor woman in his example is commendable, and his condemning of mean and thoughtless blaming is worthy of our applause. Moreover, his observation of the "remarkable etiological similarity... between cause in thinking and blame in feeling" is valid; any rational person would be sure that a party had committed an act before blaming him for it. But it is nonsense to speak of the "non-teleological picture" as the "larger one that goes beyond blame or cause". If a person tries to repress his righteous indignation in an effort to be "objective", he is abdicating his responsibility as a functioning human being and playing the role of a de-humanized spectator. "The larger picture" is not one that blames without sufficient evidence, nor one that abjures blaming, but one that blames those who are proven blameworthy on the basis of thorough and objective observation.

Steinbeck's attitude may be due in part to his acquaintance with Freudian thought which points out the irrational, unconscious motivation of much of human behaviour. That Steinbeck was influenced by Freudian theories will be shown below in connection with particular novels.¹⁵ In their

¹⁴Sea of Cortez, pp.147,148.

¹⁵Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Wayward Bus.

discussion on Freudianism in their Backgrounds of American Literary Thought, Horton and Edwards point out some difficulties created by Freud's wish to deny the "illusion of free will" and his insistence on sexual determinism in human activity. This particular passage seems directed at the kind of attitude that Steinbeck displays in his "larger," "non-teleological picture" that "goes beyond blame or cause":

...The reader [or writer] ..., fortified with a smattering of Freudian psychology,...is invited to follow the moral attitude of the French proverb: To know all is to forgive all....
 ...Freud's ambiguous attitude toward the role of reason as a controlling factor in human behavior has proved a stumbling block to his too-literal followers. In general, as we have seen, Freud discounts the effectiveness of reason and stresses the supremacy of the non-rational libido. On the other hand, the whole aim of the psychoanalytic method is to bring to the conscious mind of the patient the sexual origins of his neurosis, as though the final therapeutic effect could be achieved by some act of rational choice on the patient's part.¹⁶

And it is not only because the method of psychoanalysis includes an appeal to the subject's reason that determinism and the non-blaming attitude based on Freudian psychological theory must be rejected. It is a psychological fact that humans, when they have been clearly shown where the responsibility lies for acts of wickedness or folly, no matter how "objective" they profess to be, will blame wrongdoers, and rightly so. Blaming is an emotional response, but when guided by reason, it is not an irrational

¹⁶Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), p.347.

response. No matter how Steinbeck professes to refrain from blaming, there often is "blame implied in every word" when he is describing, for example, American society, and his implied censure is not inappropriate:

...we could feel, how the Indians of the Gulf, hearing about the great ant-doings of the north, might shake their heads sadly and say, "but it is crazy. It would be nice to have new Ford cars and running water, but not at the cost of insanity...."

 ...Time and beauty, they thought, could not be captured and sold, and we knew they not only could be, but that time could be warped and beauty made ugly. And again it was not good or bad sic. Our people would pay more for pills in a yellow box than in a white box--even the refraction of light had its price. They would buy books because they should rather than because they wanted to. They bought immunity from fear in salves to go under their arms. They bought romantic adventure in bars of tomato-colored soaps. They bought education by the foot and hefted the volumes to see that they were not short-weighted. They purchased pain, and then analgesics to put down the pain. They bought courage and rest and had neither....¹⁷

It will be shown below, with respect to particular works, that the tone of Steinbeck's fiction is often the result of his determinism and his assumed non-blaming attitude in conflict with righteous indignation. Sometimes this produces conscious satire, but sometimes it produces a strained pseudo-objectivity, as in The Pearl, for example. Steinbeck's reputation rests largely on his social protest novels, and rightly so. Any person who had read, say, only The Grapes of Wrath, would be surprised

¹⁷Sea of Cortez, pp.242,244.

to hear that Steinbeck claims to blame no one, nor even to assign causes for the social injustices he describes-- that he advocates the complacent attitude of saying that that is the way the world "is" and that nothing can be done about it.

Steinbeck treats his rejection of mechanistic causality and the prerogative to blame as if it were intrinsically connected with his totality concept of the universe, his brand of Oriental or Hegelian transcendentalism. Such a connection could be based on the beliefs that all parts of the universe have an effect, however slight, on any particular part, at any given time; and that all antecedent conditions must be considered as having had an influence on any particular event. Thus, according to this theory, no particular thing or event could be understood in isolation from the whole. Moreover, no event is repeatable, for the whole universe, with all its antecedent states, is never the same twice. According to this view, the concept of causality dissolves, for it is based on the repeatability of events.

The above outlined argument is another one of those reductio ad absurdum logical demonstrations that stimulate philosophical analysis. Neither the layman nor the novelist often thinks in these terms. It is not necessary for the creative writer to reject causality and/or free will in order to espouse Transcendentalism as a literary point of

view such as that held by Emerson and Thoreau. Moreover, as was shown above, philosophic determinism, even if it is accepted, is not equivalent to the pessimism or condoning of irresponsible behaviour which often passes for determinism amongst litterateurs.

Yet because Steinbeck does consider his transcendentalism and his non-causal, non-blaming beliefs as mutually dependent aspects of his "non-teleological" philosophy, this totality concept of the universe will be relevant to the analysis carried out in this paper. Therefore, this typical expression of his transcendentalism, from the Sea of Cortez, is quoted:

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 when an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. [Incidentally, Steinbeck's reference to Einstein's theory is inapplicable, and is an instance of his fumbling with prestigious concepts he does not understand.] 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 as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and trees, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it....And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable. This is a simple thing to say, but the profound feeling of it made a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and with his own voice discovered and reaffirmed with astonishment

the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things....It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again.¹⁸

This interest in groups--from three or four persons to the whole universe--is manifest on several levels in Steinbeck's works. In Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, he shows how a small group of men behaves-- how the individual member affects and is affected by the group. In The Grapes of Wrath, and, more especially, in In Dubious Battle, he shows how larger groups, indeed mobs, whose members do not even all know each other, affect the individual member; and how the group can be guided, and its moods and movements sometimes anticipated by a born leader, such as London, or an experienced agitator, such as Mac. At this level, the issue of free will is important because the leaders find that it is possible, but only with deliberate exertion of will-power, to remain cool and rational while attempting to direct a mob. In these novels, too, we have examples of men who believe in the spiritual teleologies which Steinbeck bitterly ridicules in The Sea of Cortez. Mac and Jim in In Dubious Battle fervently believe in the eventual triumph of the proletariat, even though a particular strike may fail. On an even more inclusive level, Jim Casy of The Grapes of Wrath believes in the eventual realiza-

¹⁸Sea of Cortez, pp.216-217.

tion of the brotherhood of man on earth.

A reading of The Grapes of Wrath, say, leaves one with the impression that Steinbeck, at the time he wrote the novel, was filled with the hope which he later disparaged in The Sea of Cortez. It becomes clear that Steinbeck's thinking was never non-teleological at all--but that it oscillated between the optimistic, humanistic transcendentalism of Jim Casy; and the pessimistic, sentimental primitivism and determinism of The Pearl; both of which are teleological views in the correct sense of the word, beliefs that no matter what is done, a certain end will come about and persist.

The following passage from Steinbeck's exposition in The Sea of Cortez of his so-called "non-teleological" view is blatantly teleological. It alludes to Darwinian evolutionary concepts which are both teleological and causative. Evolution is teleological in that it sees life constantly developing towards more complex, more intelligent, "higher" forms. Survival of the fittest is a teleological concept in that the natural killing off of weak members of a species in the competition for food, before they can reproduce, brings about a "beneficial" end, the "improvement" of the species itself. Yet it is explained by efficient causality, too. For if one asks why a particular reindeer, say, was killed by wolves and not another, the cause or reason can be given:

he was weak and could not keep up with the herd; he lagged behind, was cut off from the others, and was easily brought down by the wolf pack. Steinbeck applies these concepts to the species homo sapiens:

We think these historical waves may be plotted and the harmonic curves of human group conduct observed. Perhaps out of such observation a knowledge of the function of war and destruction might emerge. Little enough is known about the function of individual pain and suffering, although from its profound organization it is suspected of being necessary as a survival mechanism. And nothing whatever is known of the group pains of the species, although it is not unreasonable to suppose that they too are somehow functions of the surviving species. It is too bad that against even such investigation we build up a hysterical and sentimental barrier. Why do we dread to think of our species as a species? Can it be that we are afraid of what we may find? That human self-love would suffer too much and that the image of God might prove to be a mask? This could be only partly true, for if we could cease to wear the image of a kindly, bearded, interstellar dictator, we might find ourselves true images of his kingdom, our eyes the nebulae, and universes in our cells.¹⁹

Steinbeck expresses here a kind of optimistic humanism and an impatience with persisting vestiges of nineteenth century, institutional-religious, anti-Darwinism. He is not to be attacked for holding teleological views, but for not recognizing his own vacillation between pessimism and optimism, and for claiming to have a non-teleological view when he actually holds a teleological view.

¹⁹Sea of Cortez, pp.264-265.

CHAPTER II

TORTILLA FLAT

The casual reader of the more popular of Steinbeck's novels tends to accept them as light entertainment (Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row) or as well-written journalistic reports of the plight of the labourer (In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath), valuing them, but not considering them very important, and discounting both enthusiastic laudations of their profundities and disappointed appraisals of their failure to achieve the status of great literature. In his John Steinbeck, Warren French challenges this condemning with faint praise, by asserting that one of the three most salient features that he sees in Steinbeck's works is his tendency to write allegorically.¹

Acquaintance with Steinbeck's early novels Cup of Gold and To a God Unknown, and the analyses of them in both French's book and Peter Lisca's The Wide World of John Steinbeck would also dispel the illusion of triviality in Steinbeck's works. That Steinbeck's purpose was serious is not necessarily to say that his work is valuable, of course, and the accepted critical evaluation of these two early novels is low.

Lisca calls Steinbeck's Henry Morgan a Faustian character and compares him to Hawthorne's Roger Chillingworth and

¹Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), "Preface," p.8.

Ethan Brand.² French compares him to Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby.³ For the purposes of this paper, it is enough to point out that Steinbeck was aware of a major theme in Western literary thought -- that of the archetypal Western man who manifests the "sin of pride", or, in other terminology, never matures past a childish narcissism, and sees the universe only in terms of himself and the "other" which must be dominated -- necessarily failing to satisfy his insatiable ambition, and rejecting love and his own human nature in the process. Cup of Gold also is proof of Steinbeck's acquaintance with Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur.

A reading of To a God Unknown and Lisca's and French's criticism of it leave no room for doubt that Steinbeck was familiar with insights into the psychological, mythical, and ritualistic aspects of man and society which were current amongst intellectuals of the nineteen-twenties. Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Jung's racial memory theory, and Frazer's Golden Bough⁴ were not unknown to Steinbeck.

This insistence on Steinbeck's seriousness is necessary as a preface to a discussion of Tortilla Flat, for this is perhaps the work most likely to be dismissed as slight. It was his first popular success, and it was widely consumed as escape reading. Steinbeck's publisher at the time, Robert

²Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p.27.

³French, p.33.

⁴"Ricketts once referred to The Golden Bough as Steinbeck's vade mecum." Lisca, p.223.

O. Ballou, who was, of course, familiar with Steinbeck's seriousness as a writer, derogated the book for what he regarded as its lack of structure and its lack of significant thought:

...If Tortilla Flat were to my mind an important book and one which is representative of what you have to say, I would be the first to say, 'the hell with the critics and the public'; but it isn't an important book and it doesn't add to your stature as a novelist. My feeling of disappointment at the end of it lay in the fact that all the way through I had been looking for and waiting for some important story or argument and found it nowhere.⁵

Tortilla Flat is indeed delightfully entertaining, but it is a misconception to believe that this indicates a lack of depth. Tragedy is not the only genre of profundity. Indeed, comedy, when it is as excellent entertainment as is Tortilla Flat, when it is not "cute" and conventional, when it is fresh instead of stale, may well turn out to be "great" comedy. A useful classification of types of comedy is found in Bonamy Dobree's Restoration Comedy.⁶ Amongst the types he mentions is critical comedy, which is characterized by a social corrective purpose, a pricking of illusions by laughter, a derision of pretensions, and which is a mild, conservative reaction against modish folly; Congreve's The Way of the World is an example. Another type is great

⁵Letter from Robert O. Ballou to John Steinbeck cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., p.74.

⁶Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), pp.10-16.

comedy which exposes a fundamental delusion of mankind, which reflects doubt creeping in where positiveness has failed, which apprehends the absurdity of human existence; Cervantes' Don Quixote is an example.

That Steinbeck is at least, aware of the nature of "great" comedy or tragicomedy is explicitly clear in Tortilla Flat. Pablo, one of the paisanos, tells the story of Tall Bob Smoke, an unhappy and insecure young man who wanted desperately to be a hero, and who, in order to solicit sympathy and feed his self-pity, feigned suicide -- but accidentally shot off his own nose. Jesus Maria's critical comment catches the essence of this tragicomedy:

...That story of Tall Bob is funny; but when you open your mouth to laugh, something like a hand squeezes your heart. I know about old Mr. Ravanno who hanged himself last year. And there is a funny story too, but it is not pleasant to laugh at.⁷

Jesus Maria then tells the story of Old Pete Ravanno and his son Petey. The old man loves and admires his son, and childishly imitates him in all things. When Petey falls desperately in love with the sexy and coquettish Gracie Montez, the old man desires her equally sexy and coquettish fourteen-year-old sister 'Tonia. When Petey, driven to distraction, hangs himself only to be rescued by the old man barely in time, and thereby wins the love of

⁷John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat (New York:Modern Library, 1937), p.248.

Gracie; the old man determines to imitate his son's success. He decides to hang himself in a tool shed where his fellow workmen will see him and rescue him. "He put the rope around his neck and stepped off a work bench. And just when he did that, the door of the tool shed blew shut." When Petey told 'Tonia of the accident she laughed coquettishly. Petey laughed ashamedly. "Then 'Tonia laughed again and ran away a little. And she said, "Do you think I am as pretty as Gracie?" So Petey followed her into the house."

Pilon, the most practical and conventional of the paisanos, is as dissatisfied with Jesus Maria's story as Robert O. Ballou was later to be with John Steinbeck's story, Tortilla Flat:

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

But Pablo, a less distinguished paisano than Pilon, voices the "popular" opinion:

"I like it," said Pablo. "I like it because it hasn't any meaning you can see, and still it does seem to mean something, I can't tell what."⁸

Another clue to what Steinbeck is up to is given in the mock-heroic Preface and chapter titles. Peter Lisca adds to this evidence the letter Steinbeck wrote to his

⁸Tortilla Flat, p.257.

agents in reply to various publishers' remarks about the book's form: "...The book has a very definite theme. I thought it was clear enough. I had expected that the plan of the Arthurian cycle would be recognized..."⁹ With these hints to help them, both Lisca and French look for an allegory, and by "allegory" they seem to mean a one-to-one correspondence between Tortilla Flat and Le Morte d'Arthur; and they are disappointed when they do not find it.

As far as the letter to his agents is concerned, critics should sympathize with the writer who has been asked to explain or justify his art to his publishers, and should realize that any reply he gives, in order not to undermine his artistic integrity, must be tongue-in-cheek. Steinbeck may well have been hurt by their crassness, but he gently and ironically told them to look at the work itself, for it is there that they will find the reference to the Arthurian cycle. As Lisca says, "Revealing as this letter may seem, it actually presents very little that is not made obvious in the novel itself." And in the novel itself, there will be found only the hunt for "mystic treasure on Saint Andrew's Eve", the search for Danny in Chapter Fifteen, the mock-heroic chapter titles, and this passage from the preface:

⁹Letter cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., pp.75-76.

This is the story of Danny and of Danny's friends and of Danny's house....For Danny's house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny's friends were not unlike the knights of it....

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

It is surprising that Lisca and French expected a close allegory, and, indeed, one wonders what the point of it would have been if it had been found. The above quoted passage is not the voice of Steinbeck, but that of the story-teller of Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck's persona. Remember that this persona is a sort of paisano himself. He is naive; he really believes that Danny is a true-life hero like Billy the Kid or Bat Masterson; he will not listen to anthropologists, sociologists, or psychologists with their archetypes or racial memory theories. He is like the persona used by Alexander Pope in another mock-heroic tale, The Rape of the Lock, who "really believed" that a foppish beau's snipping a lady's lock had epic proportions. And the reader who appreciates Pope's poem as great comedy and not as a mere piece of fluff may also appreciate Tortilla Flat.

The reference to "sour scholars" is an invitation to the careful reader to reflect on just what scholars of the 'twenties and 'thirties were saying about folk heroes, myths,

and epics. Epics and heroic tales, whether they be great literature like Homer's works, the Beowulf of the Anglo Saxon poet, or Malory's Morte d'Arthur; or popular sentimentalizations of Robin Hood, "Pretty Boy Floyd, the Outlaw," or Wyatt Earp, have this in common: they are conceived of by members of an established culture who look back to their origin, to the rapacious scrabblings which actually established the seeds of their stable society, and aggrandize it so that they themselves -- the descendents not of ignorant, driven barbarians, now, but of "heroes" -- may see meaning and dignity in their own lives and their own culture.

The scholar, in comparing folk myths, does not look for a one-to-one correspondence; his method demands more insight and intuition. Sir James G. Frazer describes his purpose in The Golden Bough as follows:

...if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives which led to its institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show, lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood of Nemi.¹⁰

Steinbeck's persona, the story-teller of Tortilla Flat, is a partisan exaggerator of the heroic stature of Danny and his friends. Steinbeck used him in mock imitation

¹⁰ Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1963), pp. 2-3.

of the author of Morte d'Arthur. In the Arthurian Cycle he had found stories which "...are the stuff psychiatry is made of. They are actually the lore on which our attitudes are based...."¹¹ Steinbeck had intended to bring out his own edition of Malory which would be "a bridge between the scholarly few and the great mass of readers."¹² He settled for converting some anecdotes -- incidents that he gathered while working "in a big sugar mill where I was assistant chief chemist and Majordomo of about sixty Mexicans and Yuakis taken from the jails of northern Mexico..."¹³ or that he had heard recounted by Susan Gregory, a long-time resident of Monterey¹⁴-- into a unified mock mythology.

The world of Tortilla Flat, described by the mock Malory "just as things happened," seems primitive and quaint to the modern reader. The characters appeared to be mere animals to some sophisticates of the 'thirties, much as the American Indians appeared to sixteenth-century European courtiers. But if the reader assumes the role of "sour scholar" or amateur anthropologist, he will not "sneer", but will see parallels between the society of Tortilla Flat

¹¹From a letter from John Steinbeck to C.V. Wicker cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., p.79.

¹²Loc.cit.

¹³From a letter from John Steinbeck to his agents cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., p.73.

¹⁴Lisca, op.cit., p.73.

and other societies (say, twentieth-century, U.S.A.); he will find, to borrow Frazer's locution, "motives which have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike."

It is from such a point of view that the world of Tortilla Flat will be examined hereunder. A fairly extensive analysis will be undertaken because there are important aspects of the novel which have not yet been brought out clearly. An attempt will be made to show, first, that Tortilla Flat is not merely escape reading, but has a satiric level, an aspect of "critical comedy"; and, secondly, that the novel has a black or tragicomic vision at the heart of it. These characteristics are related to the theme of free will inasmuch as the satiric level reveals man as the great rationalizer, and the tragicomic aspect depicts, in the character of Danny, a compulsive personality driven by subconscious forces beyond his own understanding or control.

On the level of social satire, then, Danny's friends are an ecological unit centering on Danny's house and held together by their love and respect for Danny. It is a unit in the society of Tortilla Flat, which, in turn, reflects aspects of larger societies and civilizations, whether one takes the "biological" view or the anthropo-sociological view.

Any ecological unit needs a food supply; any society

needs its food gatherers or agricultural labourers. In Danny's house this role is played by the Pirate. Superficial readers say that the characters of Tortilla Flat are all simple primitives who don't work. Actually the Pirate is the only one who is a simple primitive and the only one who does work.

At first, before the Pirate became a part of "Danny's house," the ecological unit was unstable because other members had to gather food on a catch-as-catch-can basis. It was Pilon, shrewdest and most practical of the paisanos, and the most adept at rationalizing exploitation and making it seem like philanthropy, who first noticed that the Pirate was a potential source of wealth. His first plan was to "relieve" the Pirate of the "responsibility" of his two-bits; that is, to rob him:

...The Pirate has money, but he has not the brain to use it. I have the brain! I will offer my brain to his use. I will give freely of my mind. That shall be my charity toward this poor little half-made man.¹⁵

Such beautiful rationalization is worthy of the expeditors and promoters of any society. It is probably "immoral" by the standards of American capitalism, but one would not like to say. One would not like to compare it to, say, the "fair solution" to the strike offered by the respected businessman of In Dubious Battle:

Bolter smiled around at them, one at a time, until his smile had rested on each face. "Well, I think you

¹⁵Tortilla Flat, pp.98-99.

ought to have a raise," he said. "And I told everybody I thought so. Well, I'm not a very good business man. The rest of the Association explained it all to me. With the price of apples what it is, we're paying the top price we can. If we pay any more, we lose money."

.....
 Bolter put on his smile again. "I have a home and children," he said. "I've worked hard. You think I'm different from you. I want you to look on me as a working man, too. I've worked for everything I've got. Now we've heard that radicals are working among you. I don't believe it. I don't believe American men, with American ideals, will listen to radicals. All of us are in the same boat. Times are hard. We're all trying to get along and we've got to help each other.¹⁶

Mac's opinion of Mr. Bolter's philanthropy was expressed concisely and lucidly: "None of this sounds reasonable to me. So far it's sounded like a sock full of crap."

But the Pirate lacks Mac's perceptiveness, and plays right into the hands of Danny's friends. Indeed, after successfully eluding "unknown" bad men who had been harassing him, the Pirate takes his new "friends" at their word and turns his cache of two-bits over to them. To an "intelligent" person, this seems like folly, but the Pirate's naïve faith makes exploitation in the name of philanthropy impossible. He is saving the money to buy a candlestick to St. Francis, patron of animals and birds, who, he believes, watches over his dogs. He openly entrusts the money to the paisanos. What rationalization could possibly justify exploitation of him now?

So the Pirate and his dogs, a tiny ecological unit in themselves, become an integral part of Danny's house. He

¹⁶John Steinbeck. In Dubious Battle (New York: Viking, 1963), pp.223-224.

supplies food and they give him human companionship (supplementing the deep loyalty of his dogs) and the occasional taste of the communal wine jug.

The Pirate provides provender; Pilon is the promoter. Other paisanos represent other necessary parts of the tiny commonwealth. Jesus Maria is a sentimental philanthropist and a very loving person:

It has been said that Jesus Maria Corcoran was a great-hearted man. He had also that gift some humanitarians possess of being inevitably drawn toward those spheres where his instinct was needed. How many times had he not come upon young ladies when they needed comforting.¹⁷

His humanitarian qualities stimulate the paisanos to steal food for the husbandless Teresina Cortez and her eight children. This not only helps the good woman but provides the paisanos with a project which further stimulates their already robust esprit de corps. "It was a glorious game. Theft robbed of the stigma of theft, crime altruistically committed -- what is more gratifying?"¹⁸ The paisanos' enthusiasm is akin to that of American service clubs and benevolent societies - a blend of comradeship and the complacent awareness of doing a good deed. And when "Teresina discovered, by a method she had found to be infallible, that she was going to have a baby", and "wondered idly which one of Danny's

¹⁷Tortilla Flat, p.230.

¹⁸Ibid., p.232.

friends was responsible,"¹⁹ we can only hope that it was Jesus Maria, that great-hearted man who always knew where he was needed.

Big Joe Portagee's function in the community is to commit minor crimes and serve as a target for righteous indignation. It is handy in any society to have scape goats. Happily for Big Joe, he is tolerated more than "foreigners" or "Reds" are in some societies. His friends know his use. For example, when Pilon needs someone to dig treasure for him, he is pleased to find Big Joe guilty of stealing Danny's pants -- a crime which ought to be atoned for by such a penance as digging:

"Be still," said Pilon. "You will get that same blanket back or I will beat you with a rock." He took up the jug and uncorked it and drank a little to soothe his frayed sensibilities; moreover, he drove the cork back and refused the Portagee even a drop. "For this theft you must do all the digging. Pick up those tools and come with me."

Big Joe whined like a puppy and obeyed. He could not stand against the righteous fury of Pilon.²⁰

An orgy of righteous anger is indulged in by the paisanos, at Big Joe Portagee's expense, when he is caught stealing the Pirate's treasure, the sacred trust of Danny's friends. The friends purge themselves of accumulated frustration and sadism, their normal back-log of black emotions, and

¹⁹Tortilla Flat, p.236.

²⁰Ibid., p.139.

feel much cleaner, and closer to one another, afterwards.²¹

Perhaps the least outstanding of Danny's friends is Pablo. Nevertheless, he performs a necessary function for he is the "common man" of every society, and is useful for making sensible observations from time to time.

Danny's house, as an ecological unit, merges into the larger unit of Tortilla Flat itself, and there are various "quaint" manifestations here of institutions which are found in many societies. There is the Church for example. It is the Pirate -- the only true "primitive" in Tortilla Flat -- and his dogs who have the most faith. Although only the dogs "see the vision," the Pirate gains much from religion for it gives him a goal, telos, or purpose in life -- to save two-bits for a candlestick for St. Francis.

When the Pirate does achieve recognition from the priest, and the money for a candlestick is accepted from him, the Pirate gains some social prestige amongst the paisanos, for even the hard-headed Pilon respects the Church. For when Pablo wonders about the efficacy of masses for an old miscreant paid for by his prostitute daughter with money she steals from sleeping drunks, Pilon explains that God understands cash-on-the-barrel-head:

"A mass is a mass," said Pilon. "Where you get two-bits is of no interest to the man who sells you a glass of wine. And where a mass comes from is of no interest

²¹Tortilla Flat, pp.201-203.

to God. He just likes them, the same as you like wine."²²

Pilon respects the Church not only for its sound business sense, but also for the opportunities religion provides for enjoyable indulgences in bouts of contrition:

"I have been bad," Pilon continued ecstatically. He was enjoying himself thoroughly....

"And what was the result, Big Joe Portagee? I have had a mean feeling. I have known I would go to Hell. But now I see the sinner is never so bad that he cannot be forgiven....If you too would change your ways, Big Joe,...you too might feel as I do."

But Big Joe had gone to sleep.²³

Not all are as insensitive to religion as Big Joe, for when Teresina Cortez's children were starving, the old vieja, or grandmother, gambled their last coins on candles for the Virgin. When this bribery failed, she resorted to threats, and even insinuations against the Virgin's alleged virginity. And her religious faith was rewarded, for the children did not starve; a miracle was granted, Jesus Maria enlisted "the friends" as the Cortez's benefactors.

Other sociological and psychological phenomena observable in Tortilla Flat include status symbols and the projecting of ambition onto one's children. Sweets Ramirez is given a vacuum cleaner by Danny, and though it serves no practical function -- there is no electricity, and the machine doesn't have a motor anyway -- it estab-

²²Tortilla Flat, p.50.

²³Tortilla Flat, pp .134-135.

lishes her as a social leader in Tortilla Flat.²⁴ A little Mexican who is taken in by Danny and his friends tells them how a captain took away his pretty wife from him, a mere corporal, and how his son, a sickly babe-in-arms, is going to be a general so that he can take captains' wives away from them. This ambition for his son could give the little man a purpose in life, but, unfortunately, the baby dies.²⁵

So far, evidence has been given to show that Tortilla Flat is not mere escape reading but has a satirical bite -- that the follies, and most importantly, the rationalizations of the members of the society described are found in other societies as well. At this level, then, the book may be regarded, in Bonamy Dobree's terminology, as critical comedy. To understand the profounder aspects, one must turn to Steinbeck's unifying device in the novel, the career of Danny.

It is Danny's house, of course, which is the physical centre of the ecological unit known as "the friends of Danny". It is Danny who is the natural leader of the group, respected by the men much as London is in In Dubious Battle, or Slim is in Of Mice and Men. Danny is first in social prestige: he gets first crack at Big Joe Portagee with the stick, when the friends are beating him for stealing the

²⁴Tortilla Flat, pp.160-162.

²⁵Ibid., pp.173-186.

Pirate's treasure; he gets first sip of the wine jug; his opinion carries the most weight in community decisions.

But Danny is much more than this. As the storyteller says, "It must be remembered...that Danny is now a god."²⁶ How did this come about?

The biologist, when comparing man's society to other ecological units, finds that an outstanding characteristic of mankind is his need, as an individual and as a member of society, to feel assured that both his own life and his society have a meaning. This is what Steinbeck correctly calls, in The Sea of Cortez, spiritual teleology. This is reflected in a prevalent attitude towards literature: Robert O. Ballou felt that Tortilla Flat lacked unity and significance; Pilon hated the story of old Pete Ravanno because it taught no simple lesson. It is Danny that gives unity and meaning, on one level, to the book Tortilla Flat, and, on another level, to the social unit of Danny's friends and, to some extent, the larger society of Tortilla Flat itself.

All men have a need to "philosophize", to come to terms with their existence, and the paisanos show great wisdom in this. They spend the hot part of the day in languidly recounting incidents, musing on them, and trying to express their meaning:

²⁶Tortilla Flat, p.298.

...From this time until well after noon, intellectual comradeship came into being. Then roofs were lifted, houses peered into, motives inspected, adventures recounted. Ordinarily their thoughts went first to Cornelia Ruiz, for it was a rare day and night during which Cornelia had not some curious and interesting adventure. And it was an unusual adventure from which no moral lesson could be drawn.

The sun glistened in the pine needles. The earth smelled dry and good. The rose of Castile perfumed the world with its flowers. This was one of the best times for the friends of Danny. The struggle for existence was remote. They sat in judgment on their fellows, judging not for morals, but for interest....²⁷

Individual paisanos have their own ways of understanding life. The Pirate has his naïve religious faith, his love for his dogs, and his affectionate, though sometimes bewildered, respect for his new "friends". Jesus Maria and Pablo intuitively understand life as they understand tragicomedy: "...it does seem to mean something, I can't tell what." Pilon is more analytically minded, but fortunately for him, he also has a talent for rationalization which enables him to find the "lesson" in most incidents that happen. But Danny is different.

In time, the ecological unit of Danny's house achieved a stability which would mean peace and contentment to most species, but which means ennui and insecurity to men. It is not so bad for Danny's friends, who have the various "philosophies of life" described above, and who can always look to Danny, their leader. The story-teller says that

²⁷Tortilla Flat, pp.240-241.

"The friends had sunk into a routine which might have been monotonous for anyone but a paisano --" ²⁸ and Steinbeck's irony is subtly working, for we all need, to a degree, that "diagnostic trait of the species", hope, we all need our "teleologies," and we all need our mythical heroes and leaders to help us rationalize away the meaninglessness of our lives.

But Danny is different, not in his needs, but in his lack of ability to cope with them. Neither religious faith, intuitive understanding, philosophizing, nor rationalization can stave off ennui for Danny; and he has no leader or hero to stand between him and the "Opponent". ²⁹ And it is the fact that Danny sees the problem of living in terms of unbearable ennui which can be escaped only by fighting, by challenging, by destroying an external Opponent, which is the key to the understanding of Danny and of Steinbeck's tragicomic vision.

Danny has one of the essential qualities of the Faustian man described above with respect to Ethan Brand, Jay Gatsby and Steinbeck's Henry Morgan -- viz., seeing the world, narcissistically, in terms of himself and the "other" which must be conquered, or in Danny's case, destroyed. By ironically having his persona treat Danny as an epic hero, Steinbeck is saying that in Tortilla Flat, and by implication in any society, the "Faustian hero" is actually

²⁸Tortilla Flat, p.260.

²⁹Tortilla Flat, p.301.

a little man with a great big death wish.³⁰

When ennui sets in, his thoughts turn to violence:

Danny began to feel the beating of time. He looked at his friends and saw how with them every day was the same. When he got out of his bed in the night and stepped over the sleeping paisanos, he was angry with them for being there. Gradually, sitting on the front porch, in the sun, Danny began to dream of the days of his freedom. He had slept in the woods in summer, and in the warm hay of barns when the winter cold was in. The weight of property was not upon him. He remembered that the name of Danny was a name of storm. Oh, the fights! The flights through the woods with an outraged chicken under his arm! The hiding places in the gulch when an outraged husband proclaimed feud! Storm and violence, sweet violence! When Danny thought of the old lost time he could taste again how good the stolen food was, and he longed for that old time again. Since his inheritance had lifted him, he had not fought often. He had been drunk, but not adventurously so. Always the weight of the house was upon him, always the responsibility to his friends.³¹

Even this one passage contains many hints of psychological traits which account for his actions throughout the novel. There is the seed of a disgust for his fellows; the desire to return to a previous idyllic existence of secure sleep and freedom from "the weight of property", which, since there never was any debt, is actually an irrational avoidance of the reality principle; the desire for storm and violence (a satire, perhaps, on the heroic "sturm and drang" of German romanticism); the rebellion against law and authority (projection of the superego) by childishly stealing

³⁰For evidence of Steinbeck's being explicitly aware of the Freudian theory, see In Dubious Battle, p.230. Doc tells Jim, "...Man hates himself. Psychologists say a man's self-love is balanced neatly with self-hate."

³¹Tortilla Flat, pp.260-261.

chickens or rougishly stealing wives; the hiding in caves in the gulch;³² the thrill of disobedience ("...he could taste again how good the stolen food was"); the hatred of responsibility (the reality principle).

If one traces the career of Danny, one sees a pattern which is not very funny and not very pleasant. If one looks past the comic style, this paisano appears no more cute and charming than a Lilliputian.

The story-teller begins with Danny's background. He was a rich boy. We need not be thrown off the scent by the story-teller's "quaint" criterion of wealth:

His grandfather was an important man who owned two small houses in Tortilla Flat and was respected for his wealth. If the growing Danny preferred to sleep in the forest, to work on ranches, and to wrest his food and wine from an unwilling world, it was not because he did not have influential relatives.³³

When he is drunk and with friends, Danny has the world by the tail. He was in such a state when he "howled menaces at the German Empire," and was enlisted into the army. He felt he could do anything:

"...what branch?"

"What do you mean, 'branch'?"

"What can you do?"

"Me? I can do anything."

.....

"...How many mules can you drive?"

Danny leaned forward, vaguely and professionally. "How many you got?"

³²Cf. Muley's hiding in a cave in The Grapes of Wrath (New York: Viking, 1939), pp. 81-82.

³³Tortilla Flat, p. 12.

"About thirty thousand," said the sergeant.
 Danny waved his hand. "String 'em up!" he said.³⁴

This, of course, is first-rate comedy. How funny this insignificant little man with delusions of grandeur is!

When Danny comes home from the wars he finds himself, for a paisano, set up. He has inherited his grandfather's property with no strings attached. But he cannot cope with reality even to the extent of accepting his good fortune; he complains that he is "weighed down with the responsibility of ownership." He characteristically gets drunk:

...Before he even went to look at his property he bought a gallon of red wine and drank most of it himself. The weight of responsibility left him then, and his very worst nature came to the surface. He shouted; he broke a few chairs in a poolroom on Alvarado Street; he had two short but glorious fights. No one paid much attention to Danny....³⁵

Danny's destructive and self-destructive nature comes to the fore when he challenges the Sicilian fishermen, but they know him and are wisely indulgent of his tantrums. Later, in jail for salving his frustration by smashing windows, Danny sullenly squashes bedbugs he has honoured with the names of authority figures such as the Mayor.

Danny is not a very nice paisano. Any paisano will steal from a mean man like Torrelli the wine merchant, and the business of begging, as carried on by the Pirate, say,

³⁴Tortilla Flat, pp.14-15.

³⁵Ibid, p.17.

is a respectable way of obtaining one's living; but Danny steals from the man who gives him a hand-out.³⁶

Once Danny establishes himself in Tortilla Flat again, the ecological group, "Danny's friends", begins to form around his natural leadership qualities (the men do like and respect him) and his property (the second house has not yet been burned down). Danny finds a goal in trying to swindle a man-hungry widow out of her house and two hundred dollars, and this might be approved of by Pilon, say. But his action proves perverse and pointless, when its rationale is examined. He has contempt for his own property; he can't even be bothered when he hears that the paisanos have accidentally burned down his second house. He can get sexual satisfaction from more attractive women than Mrs. Morales. His whole purpose is to get the best of the woman, to humiliate her.

Our distance from Tortilla Flat enables us to laugh at the "immorality" of the paisanos, by our standards; and as long as Danny's indiscretions are committed outside the social unit of the house, then his friends, too, can be objective. But when Danny steals Pilon's shoes, their attitude suddenly changes. They are quite as serious as respectable members of any society when they judge him to be a criminal.

³⁶Tortilla Flat, pp.20-21.

"Now he has gone too far", Pilon said, "Pranks he has played, and we were patient. But now he turns to crime. This is not the Danny we know. This is another man, a bad man. We must capture this bad man."³⁷

The paisanos do not succeed in punishing him, but his destructive phase runs its course and he returns, "not conscience-stricken", but "very tired."³⁸ He now enters a depressive stage far more profound than any ennui he has ever felt before. Indeed, he is mentally ill, a potential suicide.

His friends do not understand what has come over him, and they do the best they can to bring back "the Danny they know". They arrange a great party, a bacchanalian orgy, to jolt him out of his depression.

The friends of Danny do not realize yet that they have lost him forever. The energetic, wise-cracking, devil-may-care, irreverent rich boy that they knew -- the wise and stable, property-owning leader that he became -- are both gone forever. Mental illness is one name that can be given to the encroachment on his personality of the terrible forces of destruction and self-destruction which makes him appear larger than life to members of Tortilla Flat society who had never known him intimately. He is becoming the property of all; he is becoming myth.

At the party, Danny forms the nucleus of an unleash-

³⁷Tortilla Flat, p.269.

³⁸Tortilla Flat, p.283.

ing of libidinal energy which engulfs a whole ecological unit -- not that of "Danny's friends" merely, but the society of Tortilla Flat itself:

That was a party for you! Always afterward when a man spoke of a party with enthusiasm, someone was sure to say with reverence, "Did you go to that party at Danny's house?" And unless the speaker were a new-comer, he had been there....Never had there been such fights; not fights between two men, but roaring battles that raged through whole clots of men, each one for himself.

Oh, the laughter of women! Thin and high and brittle as spun glass. Oh, the ladylike shrieks of protest from the gulch. Father Ramon was absolutely astounded and incredulous at the confessions next week. The whole happy soul of Tortilla Flat tore itself from restraint and arose into the air, one ecstatic unit....³⁹

In Danny himself, this libidinal energy manifests itself partly as pure sex drive: "...the reputed sexual prowess of Danny may be somewhat overstated. One tenth of it would be an overstatement for anyone in the world." But also it comes out as an overpowering death wish:

Danny, say the people of Tortilla Flat, had been rapidly changing his form. He had grown huge and terrible. His eyes flared like the headlights of an automobile. There was something fearsome about him. There he stood, in the room of his own house. He held the pine table leg in his right hand, and even it had grown. Danny challenged the world.

"Who will fight?" he cried. "Is there no one left in the world who is not afraid?"...⁴⁰

There follows a mock-heroic passage which thinly disguises the pathos of this little man gyrating in the throes of

³⁹Tortilla Flat, p.296.

⁴⁰Tortilla Flat, p.300.

this obscene force which is searing his soul from his body. He becomes the archetype of Faustian man when he challenges the universe:

... "Then I will go out to The One who can fight.
I will find The Enemy who is worthy of Danny!"

The persona even manages to make the scufflings of the drunken and hysterical paisano, as heard from inside the house, seem heroic. Soon, however, there is a scream, a thump, and then silence. Poor Danny has blundered over the edge of a ravine and smashed himself to a broken and twisted rag doll. Danny's friends carry him into the house where he dies.

Steinbeck gives us clues to the correct interpretation of his tragicomedy by having his persona debunk it:

Some time a historian may write a cold, dry fungus-like history of The Party. He may refer to the moment when Danny defied and attacked the whole party, men, women and children with a table-leg. He may conclude, "A dying organism is often observed to be capable of extraordinary endurance and strength." Referring to Danny's super-human amorous activity that night, this same historian may write with unshaking hand: "When any living organism is attacked, it's whole function seems to aim toward reproduction."

But I say, and the people of Tortilla Flat would say "To hell with it. That Danny was a man for you!"
...⁴¹

The myth-maker and the people of Tortilla Flat do have the last say in the book, for it is they and not Danny's

⁴¹Tortilla Flat, p.298.

friends who attend Danny's funeral. This represents the fact that Danny has been mythologized and thus taken over by the people of his society who did not know him well as a person but who claim him as a symbolic hero.

Robert O. Ballou failed to find a unifying "important story or argument" in this masterpiece of tragicomedy. One wonders whether the following rationale would satisfy him or do justice to Steinbeck: Tortilla Flat is a collection of anecdotes just as life is a collection of incidents. And when one remembers a past time, he thinks of it in terms of a place he lived, a group of friends he lived with, or a strong person who influenced him. For the paisanos the incidents of the novel would be unified in their minds by the remembered atmosphere of Danny's house, the esprit de corps of Danny's friends, and the compelling personality of Danny.

If that is unsatisfactory to Robert O. Ballou, as it probably would be to a man like Pilon who likes to see the lesson in things, then the following rationale might be offered: Tortilla Flat is an allegory for any society. There are Pilons, Jesus Marias, Pablos and Pirates, Sweets, Ramirezes, and Tall Bob Smiths everywhere. The institutions of Tortilla Flat have their analogues in America and elsewhere. Moreover, every culture has its folk heroes, and a close look at them tells much about that society. A member of some "Tortilla Flat Chamber of Commerce" who believes the

myth of the Danny whose name was spelled out in flaming letters in the clouds would disbelieve the story of Danny Steinbeck wrote below the surface, just as much as a zealous Southerner in the U.S.A. might reject a story like Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

Steinbeck's attitude towards free will has not been commented on throughout the above discussion of Tortilla Flat. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the novel had not been fully appreciated to date, and a thorough analysis on its own merits was its due. Secondly, Steinbeck's annoying pessimism or literary determinism has not yet reached sentimental "Weltschmerz" proportions in this novel as it does in later ones. The effect of the novel is so entirely comic on a first reading, that even after carefully analyzing it, one can hardly believe what Steinbeck is really saying: that the men of Tortilla Flat, and, by implication, the men of any society, get through life by rationalizing constantly; that the heroes we admire are, in reality, compulsive neurotics motivated by a need to impose their will on the world; men who, while seeming to be Promethean benefactors, bringers of light and life, are in reality driven by a death wish.

His view is not pessimistic in this novel because, apart from Danny, the paisanos are all likeable, or even lovable. If the world is made up of Pilonis, Jesus Marias, Pablos, and Pirates, then -- despite their minor frailties

and their major rationalizations -- men are good. Even men like Danny are "useful" to the ecological unit (to take a teleological view), for, despite the destruction he is capable of, he provides, in his mythologized form, an ideal which helps to give life meaning. If there are no enlightened individuals who can live without rationalization, phony heroes, and false teleologies in Tortilla Flat, that does not mean that the same is true of the society who made up Steinbeck's audience. But then he had not yet read the reviews.

CHAPTER III

IN DUBIOUS BATTLE

It is not possible in this paper to deal with all of Steinbeck's novels as thoroughly as Tortilla Flat has been treated. The analyses of Peter Lisca, in The Wide World of John Steinbeck, and Warren French, in John Steinbeck, of In Dubious Battle are a great help here, and their treatments will be taken as a basis for further discussion.

Assuming their general analyses to be basically sound, a few particular points will be examined more closely. Lisca quotes from a letter from Steinbeck to his agents written while the work on In Dubious Battle was in progress. He wrote, "I guess it is a brutal book, more brutal because there is no author's moral point of view."¹ Lisca goes on to cite Steinbeck's thoughts in The Sea of Cortez. Earlier in this paper, with respect to the latter book, mention was made of Steinbeck's assumed "non-blaming" attitude which he includes as part of his "non-theological point of view." It may be recalled that Steinbeck's espoused "non-blaming" attitude was discovered to be not desirable objectivity, but a kind of literary determinism which refuses to hold blameworthy persons morally responsible for their actions.

In In Dubious Battle Steinbeck achieved the objectivity of style at which he aimed. Although objectivity

¹Lisca, op.cit., p.114.

is a legitimate desideratum in the presentation of the issues dealt with in this novel, a "non-blaming" attitude on the part of the author is neither desirable nor, indeed, present. Nor does the reader feel inclined to renounce his "blaming" faculties.

The essential thing to grasp is the difference between an objective style of writing and a "non-blaming" attitude. An objective style of writing, when applied to social themes, gives the reader a true picture on which to base his attitudes so that he can assign blame where blame is due. There are at least three alternatives to this method: The writer could present a biased view of the conditions he purports to describe objectively; this would constitute propaganda. The writer could present an objective description of sociological conditions, interspersed with explicitly "blaming" editorial comment like some of the inter-chapters in The Grapes of Wrath; this would constitute an artistically legitimate and humanly conscientious approach. The writer could deliberately use a subjective style, perhaps employing a persona to make clear his own objectivity; this would be artistically sound. The writer could lapse into sentimental subjectivity under the guise of a "non-blaming" attitude, perhaps winning the allegiance of sentimental readers, thereby, but losing the respect of critical readers; it will be shown below that Steinbeck does

this in The Pearl.

The situations which Steinbeck describes in In Dubious Battle -- situations which are shown by Warren French to be not merely particular social injustices but examples of universal themes -- could be analyzed as follows:

Mr. Bolter and the Growers Association are, no doubt, typical of some of the capitalists who exploited labour in California in the 'thirties. More generally, they represent all Americans who have sold out American ideals. More generally still, they are typical of a species of humanity which is driven by a lust for power and whose psychology is characterized by self-righteous rationalization alongside cynical hypocrisy, augmented by a lack of self-awareness and an intuitive genius for grasping the potential for exploitation in social situations.² Steinbeck is not simply an anti-capitalist.

Jim and Mac are two Communist "true believers",³ men who have a strong need for a purpose outside themselves, who are teleologically oriented. Warren French sees Jim as a pure and idealistic Parsifal and Mac as a callous and power-mad agitator. Though one might not go all the way in agreeing with French's analysis, it is clear that the two

²John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, pp.221-228.

³Cf. Eric Hoffer's characterization of types of revolutionaries in The True Believer (New York:Harper and Row, 1951).

men do not understand their own psychological motivation, and are reluctant to analyze the meaning of their obsessional telos, the triumph of the proletariat.

The workingmen as individuals are objectively depicted as being like the riff-raff of all times and places. Occasionally likeable, they are more often quarrelsome, jealous, selfish, and stupid. Their moral worth is recognized intuitively by London most of the time, and by Mac and Jim from time to time when they are not thinking in terms of their ultimate purpose. It is recognized by Doc Burton intuitively from time to time and as a moral principle all of the time.

The workingmen as a mob form an ecological unit which is penetratingly described by Steinbeck as an organism with a purpose of its own quite different from that of the individual members. Mac, London, and, after a time, Jim understand this from practical experience. Doc Burton reflects on this phenomenon intellectually, and theorizes that group man is motivated primarily by a death wish:

"There aren't any beginnings," Burton said. "Nor any ends. It seems to me that man has engaged in a blind and fearful struggle out of a past he can't remember, into a future he can't foresee nor understand. And man has met and defeated every obstacle, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself. How mankind hates itself."

Jim said, "We don't hate ourselves, we hate the invested capital that keeps us down."

"The other side is made of men, Jim, men like you. Man hates himself. Psychologists say a man's self-love is balanced neatly with self-hate.

Mankind must be the same. We fight ourselves and we can only win by killing every man...."⁴

The strike is a particular manifestation of the universal tendency of group-man to destroy himself, an example of the nature of war.

French writes, "This is a pessimistic novel in that the author sees little promise of men's becoming enlightened but it is not by any means what Steinbeck has often been said to write -- a fatalistic or naturalistic novel -- in the sense that the author views man as a mechanism helpless in the grasp of some superior force."⁵ French is right, and it is necessary here only to mention some of the "optimistic" elements which balance the novel; actually, the labels "optimistic" and "pessimistic" are unfortunate because Steinbeck has succeeded in producing a very objective picture, in its details as well as its total vision.

Some men with a need to believe in a great purpose, or with a talent for leading, have, while they are yet naïve, a basically altruistic impulse; this is true of Jim and of London. Although they are easy marks for conversion to Communism, they are not compulsively death-wish oriented, and they are potentially educable. Moreover, Doc Burton, who has a tendency towards Weltschmerz, neverthe-

⁴In Dubious Battle, p.230.

⁵French, p.71.

less acts and acts altruistically. Jim, before his complete conversion to compulsive Communism, had apprehended that an organized strike of the fruit pickers, even if it were not absolutely successful, might make the cotton owners think twice about exploiting the workers. Mac had seized on this as a "clever argument," but the fact remains that organized labour can accomplish some good, and was doing so in the 'thirties, though this good is nothing like the Communist's hoped-for revolution of the proletariat.

Thus In Dubious Battle more than deserves its reputation as first-class objective literature, and need not be considered an unwarranted denial of free will, for there are examples of morally aware behaviour depicted as well as Doc Burton's vision of the uncontrollable death wish of group man. Steinbeck has depicted a world in which few men actually take on the responsibility of moral awareness, yet in which practical free will is possible. This is, indeed, the world in which we live.

CHAPTER IV

OF MICE AND MEN

Of Mice and Men is analyzed adequately by Peter Lisca in his The Wide World of John Steinbeck. He points out that there are three levels of interpretation implicit in the novel:

There is the obvious story level on a realistic plane, with its shocking climax. There is also the level of social protest, Steinbeck the reformer crying out against the exploitation of migrant workers. The third level is an allegorical one, its interpretation limited only by the ingenuity of the audience. It could be, as Carlos Baker suggests, "an allegory of Mind and Body."...The dichotomy could also be that of the unconscious and the conscious, the id and the ego, or any other forces or qualities which have the same structural relationship to each other that do Lennie and George. It is interesting in this connection that the name Leonard means "strong or brave as a lion," and that the name George means "husbandman."¹

Lisca quotes from Steinbeck's correspondence to show that the author intended to convey a definite allegory, and was doubtful about his success in getting it across: "The book Of Mice and Men was an experiment, and in what it set out to do, it was a failure."² Steinbeck's allegorical intention is apparent, also, when he speaks of the play-novelette form as being advantageous in that "the necessity of sticking to the theme (in fact knowing what the theme is), the brevity and necessity of holding an audience could influence the novel only for the better."³ Lisca further points out that,

¹Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, pp.138,139.

²From a letter written by John Steinbeck, cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., p.132.

³From an article by Steinbeck cited by Lisca, p.133.

concerning the book's theme, Steinbeck wrote his agents,

I'm sorry that you do not find the new book as large in subject as it should be. I probably did not make my subjects and my symbols clear. The microcosm is rather difficult to handle and apparently I did not get it over-the earth longings of a Lennie who was not to represent insanity at all but the inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men. Well, if it isn't there it isn't there.

Again, Lisca points out that to Ben Abramson Steinbeck wrote a similar comment on the book's theme: "...it's a study of the dreams and pleasures of everyone in the world."⁴

In his John Steinbeck, Warren French interprets the allegory as an "Arthurian story,"⁵ but a Freudian allegory is surely more feasible. Besides the evidence just given, consider the fact that we know that Steinbeck was directly concerned with Freudian themes. There is his mention of the "wish-fulfillment delusion" in the Sea of Cortez.⁶ There is his characterization of Danny in Tortilla Flat which has been shown to be based on the compulsive, death-wish oriented syndrome. There is the explicit mention of the death-wish by Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle.⁷

There is value, then, in adding to Peter Lisca's basically adequate analysis of Of Mice and Men by pursuing the Freudian allegory that he recognized. This interpretation of the allegory is of great relevance to the theme of this paper, free will and determinism.

Horton and Edwards' Backgrounds of American Literary Thought was quoted above to show how Freud's emphasis on

⁴From a letter by Steinbeck cited by Lisca, p.134.

⁵French, p.73.

⁶Sea of Cortez, p.141.

⁷In Dubious Battle, p.230.

man's irrationality and his unconscious sexual motivation are "deterministic", but that the psychoanalytic aim in "curing" neurosis is to bring unconscious drives to the attention of the ego, thereby assuming potential rationality and free will in the individual. Another reason that Freudian thought is considered pessimistic or "deterministic" is outlined by Herbert Marcuse in his Eros and Civilization:

Sigmund Freud's proposition that civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts has been taken for granted. His question whether the suffering thereby inflicted upon individuals has been worth the benefits of culture has not been taken too seriously--the less so since Freud himself considered the process to be inevitable and irreversible. Free gratification of man's instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society; renunciation and delay in satisfaction are the prerequisites of progress. "Happiness" said Freud, "is no cultural value." Happiness must be subordinated to the discipline of work as full-time occupation, to the discipline of monogamic reproduction, to the established system of law and order. The methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expressions, is culture.⁸

The significant allegory in Of Mice and Men is of the necessity for the ego to repress the id in our civilization. As the original title of the book implies, this is merely "Something that Happened"⁹ in the development of our culture.

Peter Lisca's observation provides a starting point:

The first symbol in the novel, and the primary one, is the little spot by the river where the story begins and ends....

Steinbeck's novels and stories often contain groves, willow thickets by a river, and caves which figure prominently in the action....For George and Lennie, as

⁸Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p.3.

⁹See Lisca, p.140.

for other Steinbeck heroes, coming to a cave or thicket by the river symbolizes a retreat from the world to a primeval innocence. Sometimes, as in The Grapes of Wrath, this retreat has explicit overtones of a return to the womb and rebirth....¹⁰

At the level of the Freudian allegory, George and Lennie are not two individuals at all, but the "higher" and "lower" halves of one personality, the ego and super-ego, and the id. When they are at the little spot by the river, of peace and security, it is as if the George-Lennie individual were asleep. It is here that the dreams are played out.

The main dream is the one about the "little place", the ranch and the rabbits. Notice that it is always on Lennie's insistence that George recounts the dream, for, if we follow Freud's interpretation, the purpose of a dream is to fulfill a wish originating in the libido.¹¹ When the individual is asleep, the ego allows the id to obtain satisfaction, for at this time the super-ego is relatively off guard. It is not completely so, however, for a "censor" requires that the libidinal wishes be satisfied only in symbolic form. The dream is apparently rational; the goal of the security of a small ranch is in keeping with the reality principle; it is a reasonable telos for one's life. But Lennie, the id, insists that George, the ego, get to the part about the rabbits:

¹⁰Lisca, pp.134-135.

¹¹Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, James Strachey trans., (New York:Avon Books,1965),p.154 and pp.155-166.

"...Tell about how it's gonna be."

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

"An' live off the fatta the lan'," Lennie shouted.
 "An' have rabbits. Go on, George!...Tell about that, George."¹²

The "rabbits" get past the dream censor as a normal part of a farm, but they are actually symbols of Lennie's great desire to stroke soft, warm, furry things. That this desire is explicitly "Erotic" -- though not in the form of genital sexuality -- would be doubted only by one not familiar with Freudian theory. As Freud himself puts it in his Outline of Psychoanalysis:

There can be no question that the libido has somatic sources, that it streams into the ego from various organs and parts of the body....strictly speaking the whole body is an erotogenic zone. Although the greater part of what we know about Eros -- that is, about its exponent, the libido -- has been gained from the study of the sexual function, which, indeed, in the popular view, if not in our theory, coincides with Eros nevertheless Eros includes all forms of love.

.....
 It is necessary to distinguish sharply between the concepts of "sexual" and "genital." The former is the wider concept and includes many activities that have nothing to do with the genitals.

Sexual life comprises the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body [for example, in Lennie's case, by manipulating soft, furry objects] -- a function which is subsequently brought into the service of that of reproduction. The two functions often fail to coincide completely.¹³

The George-Lennie personality, if uninhibited, would satisfy

¹²John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men (New York:Viking,1963), pp.15-16.

¹³Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, the James Strachey translation (New York:Norton,1949),pp.24,26.

its erotic desires in childishly playful stroking (as in the usual foreplay to genital sexuality) and not necessarily in genital sexuality.

What Peter Lisca calls George's "own dream" which is "quite different from Lennie's"¹⁴ is not, on the level of the Freudian interpretation, a dream at all, for the function of all dreams is to fulfill a wish of the id.¹⁵ Lennie knows that when George goes into his "If I was alone I could live so easy..." ritual, he is "giving Lennie hell." This represents the "super-ego" aspect of George punishing or repressing the id. This ritual of George's contains his only manifestation of interest in genital sexuality: "'I could live so easy and maybe have a girl.'"¹⁶ As Warren French has noticed, George is "remarkably pure."¹⁷ French thinks that this is because George allegorically represents Sir Galahad, but, by the Freudian interpretation, it is because George apart from Lennie has no libido. George's threat to Lennie to leave him and, among other things, go to a cat-house or get a girl, is the ego's threat to the id to abandon the dream of child-like love, the rabbits, and pursue genital sexuality which, as represented in the novel by Curley and Curley's wife, is basically sadistic, selfish,

¹⁴Lisca, p.140.

¹⁵"When the work of interpretation has been completed, we perceive that a dream is the fulfilment of a wish." Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p.154.

¹⁶Of Mice and Men, p.8.

¹⁷French, p.73.

and death-wish oriented. Thus "George's own dream" is no dream at all, but a "waking up," a break in the mood of the "ranch and rabbits" ritual.

Curley, as the representative of sadistic and selfish genital sexuality, is a challenge to George-and-Lennie and Eros. Curley is an insecure bully who is always challenging men to fight so that he can prove his manliness. He has been married recently and this proof of his maleness makes him "cockier'n ever." He wears a glove full of vaseline on his left hand. "'Curley says he's keepin' that hand soft for his wife.'"¹⁸ This symbol of his sexuality he vaunts in front of the other men for much the same purpose as Louie in The Wayward Bus, another selfish bully who is actually insecure about his conspicuous concupiscence, wears his little fingernail long on his left hand.¹⁹ When Curley picks a fight with Lennie, Lennie's first reaction is to remain passive. George, however, cannot bear to see Lennie cruelly beaten by Curley, and he tells Lennie to fight. Once Lennie starts to fight it is immediately apparent that his superhuman force can easily crush Curley. George tries to call off Lennie but is unable to do so, just as an individual is sometimes unable to control his emotions. With the help of Slim, who represents reason and fair play, George stops Lennie, but Lennie has already mangled Curley's

¹⁸Of Mice and Men, p.30.

¹⁹John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (New York:Viking,1947), p.101.

left hand, the symbol of his sexuality. This whole incident represents, in Freudian terms, the sadism of genital sexuality which is insecure, and its impotence in open conflict with Eros or pure libidinal energy.

Just as Curley's vaselined left hand is a symbol of his maleness, so Candy's missing right hand is a symbol of his lack of sexuality. Of course, he is depicted as an old man, sexually impotent, but, at the allegorical level, he must be considered as "female". He is capable of doing only light work, but this is always depicted as "women's work": "'I ain't much good but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some.'"²⁰ His name is a contraction of the feminine name "Candice." It is only after Lennie-and-George have met Candy that the dream of the ranch and the rabbits becomes an actual possibility. Their combined savings would soon amount to enough to buy the place; the terms of the reality principle could be met to actualize the dream. Eros could be fulfilled in reality and not merely in dreams. And, grotesque as it may seem until one remembers that Freudian Eros is a much wider concept of love than sexuality, the home of George-and-Lennie and Candy would certainly have more love in it than that of Curley and Curley's wife.

²⁰Of Mice and Men, p.65.

Another member of the bunkhouse community is Carlson who represents insensitive practicality. It is he who insists that Candy either kill his dog or let him kill it, because it is old, smells bad, and doesn't do any good; he either does not realize or does not care that Candy loves the old dog. Moreover, he is quick to join Curley in his quest to "punish" Lennie at the end.

Slim represents reason, fair-mindedness and control. He can handle a large team of mules with ease and has a sense of responsibility towards them, often tending to their special needs in the stable. He is a person who can handle himself in any situation, and his opinion is respected by all. It is he that George turns to for advice. Although he is sympathetic, he is never sentimentally so; indeed, his "voice of reason" often recommends acquiescence to insensitive practicality and blind social mores. For example, he advises Candy to give up his old dog to be killed by Carlson. Slim's is the voice of reason and necessity which shows George his only course at the end:

"I guess we gotta get 'im" Slim repeated.
George stepped close. "Couldn't we maybe bring him in an' they'll lock him up? He's nuts, Slim. He never done this to be mean.

Slim nodded. "We might," he said, "If we could keep Curley in, we might. But Curley's gonna want to shoot 'im. Curley's still mad about his hand. An' s'pose they lock him up an' strap him down and put him in a cage. That ain't no good, George."

"I know," said George. "I know."²¹

²¹Of Mice and Men, pp.107-108.

Curley's wife represents the female version of the selfish, sadistic kind of genital sexuality. Steinbeck gives her no name of her own; she is simply "Curley's wife." Just as Curley paraded his sexuality in front of the men with his glove full of vaseline, so Curley's wife is always coming around the bunk house to tantalize the womenless men. Just as Curley is insecure, so Curley's wife is always trying to convince others of her worth as a person, for example, by bragging about her supposed chance to go to Hollywood and become a "star". Eros is alien to Curley's wife; her concupiscence has no element of love in it: "'I don' like Curley. He ain't a nice fella.'"²² After Lennie has crushed Curley's hand (symbolically castrated him), Curley's wife is attracted to this superhuman reservoir of libidinal energy.

In the barn scene, where she tries to seduce him, his potential is unleashed in a gigantesque version of "Erotic" child's play, stroking her hair.²³ The physical force of his fondlings and his complete absorption and abstraction frighten Curley's wife and she panics and tries to resist. Several archetypally important things then happen. Her resistance is like the "lady-like screams of protest" that often occur in a stage of the preliminaries to sexual inter-

²²Of Mice and Men. p.98.

²³Of Mice and Men, pp.100-101.

course.²⁴ This resistance sometimes arouses the sadistic (or Thanatos) element of the id just enough to change the preliminary "Erotic" sex play into genital sexuality, thus serving the reproductive process. It sometimes arouses the super-ego, in which case the sex act may be aborted, or carried out with guilt poisoning the experience. For Lennie, the woman's panicky resistance breaks his absorption, and his super-ego, that is, the memory of George's warning against this "bad woman", is aroused:

...Lennie began to cry with fright. "Oh! Please don't do none of that," he begged. "George gonna say I done a bad thing. He ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits." He moved his hand a little and her hoarse cry came out. Then Lennie grew angry. "Now don't," he said. "I don't want you to yell. You gonna get me in trouble jus' like George says you will. Now don't you do that." And she continued to struggle, and her eyes were wild with terror. He shook her then, and he was angry with her. "Don't you go yellin'," he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck.

Lennie projects his own guilt ("George gonna say I done a bad thing") onto Curley's wife ("You gonna get me in trouble jus' like George says you will.") Steinbeck could have represented this arousal of hatred in Lennie by having him rape Curley's wife; often a sadistic impulse serves the reproductive function.²⁵ For this Freudian allegory, however, the arousal of Thanatos, or the destructive principle of the id, results in actual destruction. This scene is the antithesis of Lennie's

²⁴For examples of this in Steinbeck's works see Tortilla Flat, p.296; The Wayward Bus, pp.300-301; and, for an awareness of this on the part of the couple, The Wayward Bus, pp.268-269.

²⁵Cf. Mr.Pritchard's raping his wife in The Wayward Bus, p.288.

crushing Curley's hand; there pure libidinal energy proved more potent than sadistic sexuality; here Eros's control of the pure libinal force is usurped by Thanatos.

In the last scene of the book Lennie is hiding in the little place by the river where the George-Lennie personality dreams. Lennie is alone at first, and it is manifest how Lennie cannot function without George. Lennie is not dreaming here, but struggling hopelessly with morality and reality. Out of his head come images of Aunt Clara and a giant rabbit, very rudimentary forms of a super-ego and the reality principle respectively. The rudimentary super-ego of Lennie can merely refer Lennie to George for moral guidance: "'I tol' you an' tol' you,' she said. 'I tol' you, 'Min' George because he's such a nice fella an' good to you.'....'"²⁶ Without George, Lennie could only "return to the womb"; he could not cope with reality: "'I can go right off there an' find a cave,' he said. And he continued sadly, ' -- an' never have no ketchup -- but I won't care. If George don't want me...I'll go away. I'll go away.'"²⁷ The reality principle appears to Lennie as a giant rabbit because, since meeting Candy, the dream of the ranch and the rabbit has taken on potential reality. But the "reality principle rabbit" tells Lennie that he cannot cope with reality: "'Tend rabbits' it said scornfully.

²⁶Of Mice and Men, p.112.

²⁷Ibid., p.111.

'You crazy bastard. You ain't fit to lick the boots of no rabbit. You'd forget 'em and let 'em go hungry. That's what you'd do. An' then what would George think?'"²⁸

When George finds Lennie, the George-and-Lennie personality is reunified, and the dream ritual is begun again. George's telling Lennie the story of the ranch and the rabbit is equivalent to the ego's satisfying the id in a dream because it cannot be satisfied in reality. This is a regression from the stage where the George-Lennie personality had been encouraged by Candy to try to actualize the dream. George's shooting Lennie represents extreme repression in the George-Lennie personality. In a single individual such repression would result in neurosis; one simply cannot destroy one's id. But neurosis is looked on by psychoanalysts as the personality's attempt to "solve" an insoluble conflict. In the story, George's action is ratified by Slim, who represents reason, as the only thing he could do under the circumstances.

Thus Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men can be regarded as an allegory of the Freudian view of man in society. As Norman O. Brown puts it in Chapter I, "The Disease Called Man," of his Life Against Death,

...The Freudian revolution is that radical revision of traditional theories of human nature and human society which becomes necessary if repression is recognized as

²⁸Of Mice and Men, p.113.

a fact. In the new Freudian perspective, the essence of society is repression of the individual, and the essence of the individual is repression of himself.²⁹

It seems that George has only two choices: to let Curley and Carlson, representatives of sadistic vengeance and insensitive "practical" protection of society, destroy his libido, his Lennie -- or to destroy it himself. Like most individuals in modern society, he chooses the latter method, repression, rather than the former, which would be a kind of "anarchical" behaviour or "crime", and the subsequent inevitable legal punishment, imprisonment. It seems that both Freud and Steinbeck are saying that the only practical free will that man in society has, on the ultimate issue of happiness or personal fulfillment, is the choice of actual imprisonment or psychic imprisonment, repression. Happiness is impossible.

Whether this is, indeed, the ultimate implication of Freudian theory, and whether this is actually true of man in society are vital problems which are, of course, beyond the scope of this paper.³⁰ It is clear, however, that the above is a plausible interpretation of the allegory in Of Mice and Men.

It is necessary, now, to make explicit the extent to

²⁹Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (New York:Vintage Books, 1959), p.3.

³⁰The books of both Herbert Marcuse (Eros and Civilization) and Norman O. Brown (Life Against Death), already referred to, discuss these problems.

which Of Mice and Men reveals an attitude of determinism in Steinbeck. First of all, George, the ego of the George-Lennie personality, does have a choice, bitter as it is. Steinbeck does not go as far as the sentimental deterministic writer or individual who sees man as a pitiful automaton. Moreover, granted the choice of two evils, George (and, by implication Steinbeck) takes the lesser evil, which is the less spectacular alternative. George is not like the romantic Brett Ashley of The Sun Also Rises who rationalizes the impossibility of perfect sexual fulfillment in terms of the accidental impotence of her conception of the "perfect" man, Jake Barnes. Nor is Steinbeck the romantic that Hemingway is.

Up to this point in his career, Steinbeck has kept at bay any tendency towards cheap sentimentality. He was not able to do so indefinitely. The Freudian theme of Of Mice and Men-that man is free to live out his life in infinitely many ways, including rational and morally aware modes of life as well as irrational, irresponsible, "passionately determined" modes; but that it is necessarily impossible for man in society to be happy -- was later to form the basic theme of The Wayward Bus.

CHAPTER V

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

The Grapes of Wrath is Steinbeck's best-known novel, and a considerable amount of criticism has already dealt with its various aspects. As Warren French says, "There would seem to be little new to say about the novel...."¹ French does devote a chapter, "The Education of the Heart," to the novel, however, and adds to Peter Lisca's valuable analysis the point that The Grapes of Wrath can be regarded as the story of the Joads' growing awareness of their being part of the family of man, their gradual "triumph over familial prejudices."²

Since The Grapes of Wrath is an angry and hopeful novel, one would not expect to find in it the "non-blaming", deterministic attitude that has been objected to, above, in the discussion of The Sea of Cortez. Yet the novel is far from being inflammatory propaganda. As Peter Lisca puts it, his "honest indignation, did not carry Steinbeck into propagandism or blind him to his responsibilities as a novelist."³ Lisca goes on to point out how Steinbeck destroyed his sixty-thousand-word novel called L'Affaire Lettuceberg because "...it is a bad book and I must get rid of it. It can't be printed. It is bad because it isn't

¹French, p.95.

²Ibid., p.107.

³Lisca, p.147.

honest....My father would have called it a smart-alec book
"⁴

Part of the greatness of the novel is due to Steinbeck's combining an objective style, such as he used in In Dubious Battle, for the narrative itself, and an explicitly "blaming" editorial style in some of the interchapters. Steinbeck profoundly knew how well justified was the outrage he gives vent to; here, for example:

This little orchard will be part of a great holding next year, for the debt will have choked the owner.

This vineyard will belong to the bank. Only the great owners can survive, for they own the canneries too. And four pears peeled and cut in half, cooked and canned, still cost fifteen cents. And the canned pears do not spoil. They will last for years.

The decay spreads over the State, and the sweet smell is a great sorrow on the land. Men who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow.

.....
 There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight true rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from our orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates -- died of malnutrition -- because the food must rot, must be forced to rot.⁵

Nor is the novel, in the proper sense, non-teleological. There are (at least) two teleologies in the novel, to which the author is sympathetic, and this in no way detracts

⁴From a letter by John Steinbeck to his agents cited by Peter Lisca, op.cit., p.147.

⁵John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: Viking, 1939), pp.476-477.

from the aesthetic value of the work. Without espousing some kind of Marxist belief in the inevitable triumph of the proletariat, Steinbeck nevertheless felt a unifying trend in the anger of the exploited migrant workers. He anticipated that a unified social group was forming that was going to realize a common goal:

...and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.⁶

Casy realized that hungry people would work together for the first time when he was in jail:

"...Well, one day they give us some beans that was sour. One fella started yellin', an' nothin' happened. He yelled his head off. Trusty come along an' looked in an' went on. Then another fella yelled. Well, sir, then we all got yellin'. And we all got on the same tone, an' I tell ya, it jus' seemed like that tank bulged an' give and swelled up. By God! Then somepin happened! They come a-runnin', and they give us some other stuff to eat -- give it to us. Ya see?"⁷

This encouraged him to gather some disciples and try to organize a strike. He felt, and Steinbeck apparently felt, that the migrants were capable of social protest, of working together so that their voice would be heard and their fair demands met.

This is related to another teleological belief that Casy holds, and that Steinbeck has sympathy for, the mystic

⁶The Grapes of Wrath, p.477.

⁷Ibid., pp.521-522.

unity of man, the transcendental Oversoul:

"I figgered about the Holy Spirit and the Jesus road. I figgered, 'Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Spirit -- 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, and all of a suddent -- I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it."⁸

It is interesting to note that Casy's love of "all men an' all women" is equivalent to the Freudian concept of Eros in that it includes sexual love as part of it. When Casy was a preacher, he had felt guilty about taking a girl into the bushes after a revival meeting, of committing the "sin" of fornication when he was full of the Holy Spirit. He solves the problem by rejecting the concept of sin, not by rejecting sexuality.

Steinbeck's favourite word "teleological" is used by moral philosophers in a special sense which is not inconsistent with the sense defined in the first chapter of this paper. "A teleological [moral] theory says that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc., is the nonmoral value that is brought into being."⁹ Opposed to teleological theories are deontological theories which "deny that the right, the obligatory, and the morally good are wholly, whether

⁸The Grapes of Wrath, pp.32-33.

⁹William K. Frankena, Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), p.13.

directly or indirectly, a function of what is nonmorally good or of what promotes the greatest balance of good over evil for self, one's society, or the world as a whole."¹⁰

A famous deontological moral theory is Kant's, with its categorical imperative: "Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to be a universal law." This is mentioned here because of an action of Muley, one of the most irascible of Steinbeck's characters:

Casy picked up one of the cottontails and held it in his hand. "You sharin' with us, Muley Graves?" he asked.

Muley fidgeted in embarrassment, "I ain't got no choice in the matter." He stopped on the ungracious sound of his words. "That ain't like I mean it. That ain't. I mean" -- he stumbled -- "what I mean, if a fella's got somepin to eat an' another fella's hungry -- why, the first fella ain't got no choice. I mean, s'pose I pick up my rabbits an' go off somewheres an' eat 'em. See?"

"I see," said Casy. "I can see that. Muley sees somepin there, Tom. Muley's got a-holt of somepin, an' it's too big for him, an' it's too big for me."¹¹

The thing that Muley has "got a-holt of" is the imperative force of moral principle; there are no "if's", "but's", or "maybe's". And the thing that Steinbeck has got a hold of here is the fact that even the simplest man knows right from wrong. As Kant put it,

...within the moral knowledge of common human reason we have attained its principle. To be sure, common human reason does not think it abstractly in such a universal form, but it always has it in view and

¹⁰Frankena, p.14.

¹¹The Grapes of Wrath, p.66.

uses it as the standard of its judgements. It would be easy to show how common human reason, with this compass, knows well how to distinguish what is good, what is bad, and what is consistent or inconsistent with duty....neither science nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous. We might have conjectured beforehand that the knowledge of what everyone is obliged to do and thus also to know would be within the reach of everyone, even the most ordinary man.¹²

Muley knows that he could simply pick up his rabbits and go off somewhere and eat them. That is, he knows that he is free (noumenally free, Kant would say); it is a moral law, not a physical one, which he obeys. Kant emphasized the necessity of free will in order for morality to have any meaning: "The autonomy of the will [is] the supreme principle of morality."¹³ "The concept of freedom is the key to the explanation of the autonomy of the will."¹⁴ "Freedom must be presupposed as the property of the will of all rational beings."¹⁵

By regarding the story of The Grapes of Wrath as "The Education of the Heart" of the Joads, Warren French underlined the maturing understanding of morality in Ma Joad in particular. Towards the end of the novel, Ma Joad is

¹²Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Lewis White Beck translation, reprinted in A.J. Melden, Ethical Theories, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1955), p.302.

¹³Kant, p.325.

¹⁴Ibid., p.329.

¹⁵Ibid., p.330.

thanking Mrs. Wainwright for helping with the delivery of Rose of Sharon's baby:

Ma fanned the air slowly with her cardboard.
 "You been frien'ly," she said. "We thank you."
 The stout woman smiled. "No need to thank.
 Ever'body's in the same wagon. S'pose we was down.
 You'd a-give us a han'."
 "Yes," Ma said, "We would."
 "Or anybody."
 "Or anybody. Use' ta be the fambly was first. It
 ain't so now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the
 more we got to do."¹⁶

The realization that they would give a hand to anybody, as a matter of principle, is the achievement of a sense of moral duty. Kant places little worth on kindness rendered from inclination only, towards one's own family, for example.

To be kind where one can is duty, and there are, moreover, many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive or vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy and rejoice in the contentment of others which they have made possible. But I say that, however dutiful and amiable it may be, that kind of action has no true moral worth.... But assume that the mind of that friend to mankind was clouded by a sorrow of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the lot of others and that he still had the power to benefit others in distress, but that their need left him untouched because he was preoccupied with his own need. And now suppose him to tear himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of this dead insensibility and to do this action only from duty and without any inclination -- then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.¹⁷

¹⁶The Grapes of Wrath, p.606.

¹⁷Kant, pp.298-299.

The Joads and the Wainwrights are in the position of Kant's example; their minds are "clouded by a sorrow of their own." Steinbeck is being optimistic, yet not sentimentally so, for he depicts suffering people acting morally, not from "inclination" but from "duty".

The pressures of necessity, physical or moral, have become so great that the people, especially Ma Joad, react efficiently, almost without emotion, surely without any attempt to evade responsibility. The baby has been born dead. The men's attempt to build a dyke has failed. Pa asks Ma about Rose of Sharon:

"Think she's gonna be all right?"

"I dunno."

"Well--couldn't we -- of did nothin'?"

Ma's lips were stiff and white. "No. They was on'y one thing to do -- ever -- an' we done it."

"We worked till we dropped, an' a tree--Rain's lettin' up some." Ma looked at the ceiling, and then down again. Pa went on, compelled to talk. "I dunno how high she'll rise. Might flood the car."

"I know."

"You know ever' thing."

She was silent, and the cardboard moved slowly back and forth.

"Did we slip up?" he pleaded. "Is they anything we could of did?"

May looked at him strangely. Her white lips smiled in a dreaming compassion. "Don't take no blame. Hush! It'll be awright. They's changes -- all over."

"Maybe the water -- maybe we'll have to go."

"When it's time to go -- we'll go. We'll do what we got to do. Now hush. You might wake her."¹⁸

This is not pessimism or fatalism, but stoical acceptance of whatever comes. It is a definitive example of the dignity of human free will.

¹⁸The Grapes of Wrath, pp.604-605.

The ultimate example of this is the final scene of the novel. The starving man is described passionlessly, objectively, by Steinbeck: "He was about fifty, his whiskery face gaunt, and his open eyes were vague and staring."¹⁹ Rose of Sharon's breasts are lactating. The old man needs milk or he will die. It is clear what must be done:

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

She said "Yes."

Ma smiled. "I knowed you would. I knowed!". She looked down at her hands, tight-locked in her lap.

Rose of Sharon whispered, "Will -- will you all -- go out?"...

.....
For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. "You got to," she said. "There." Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.²⁰

In Rose of Sharon's experience are combined her own physical need to give her milk, her recognition of her moral duty, the maturity required to overcome her natural repugnance of the old man, and, finally, the simple

¹⁹Ibid., p.617.

²⁰The Grapes of Wrath, pp.618-619.

"Erotic"²¹ pleasure of giving suck. It is perhaps this final aspect that has disgusted some readers who feel that Steinbeck is using cheap, sensational symbolism here. These readers' squeamishness can well be understood, even sympathized with, but the verdict must go against these readers and the society that produces their attitude, because there could be no more natural or fitting symbol for Steinbeck's theme. Physical need and moral necessity have combined to produce a free will decision -- and the result is the most basic form of love or Eros, as basic as Lennie's need to stroke soft, furry objects.

Whereas the Joads can understand and adapt to physical and moral necessity, they can see the irrationality of social institutions which are considered necessary and acceptable to complacent, conventional people. Tom Joad's opinion of the penal system is not merely the rationalization of a criminal; it is an astute, if somewhat biased, criticism:

..."The thing that give me the mos' trouble was, it didn' make no sense. You don't look for no sense when lightnin' kills a cow, or it comes up a flood. That's jus' the way things is. But when a bunch of men take an' lock you up four years, it ought to have some meaning. Men is supposed to think things out. Here they put me in, an' keep me an' feed me four years. That ought to either make me so I won't do her again or else punish me so I'll be afraid to do her again" -- he paused -- "but if Herb or anybody

²¹In the fundamental, Freudian sense.

else come for me, I'd do her again. Do her before I could figure her out. Specially if I was drunk. That sort of senselessness kind a worries a man.²²

Muley observed, "Judge says he give you a light sentence 'cause it wasn't all your fault."

Joad said, "They's a guy in McAlester -- lifer. He studies all the time....Well, he's one hell of a bright guy an' reads law an' all stuff like that....Says he's read ever'thing about prisons now, an' in the old times; an' he says she makes less sense to him now than she did before he starts readin'. He says it's a thing that started way to hell an' gone back, an' nobody seems to be able to stop her, an' nobody got sense enough to change her. He says for God's sake don't read about her because he says for one thing you'll jus' get messed up worse, an' for another you won't have no respect for the guys that work the gover'ments."²³

Similarly, the simple people can see the injustice of the elaborately rationalized economic system which ignores human values. Individuals who serve the system abjure all moral responsibility; they forego their free will, thinking that they are thereby protected from blame. A farmer blames, indeed challenges, such an individual who is knocking down his house with a tractor:

²²Cf. the opinion of Albert Camus' character Meursault: "...I really couldn't understand why he harped on this point [Meursault's lack of contrition] so much. Of course, I had to own that he was right; I didn't feel much regret for what I had done. Still, to my mind he overdid it, and I'd have liked to have a chance of explaining to him, in a quite friendly, almost affectionate way, that I have never been able really to regret anything in my life. I've always been far too much absorbed in the present moment, or the immediate future, to think back." The Stranger, Stuart Gilbert trans., (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), pp.126-127 et passim.

²³The Grapes of Wrath, pp.74-75.

"...It's mine. I built it. You bump it down -- I'll be in the window with a rifle. You even come too close and I'll pot you like a rabbit."

"It's not me. There's nothing I can do. I'll lose my job if I don't do it. And look -- suppose you kill me? They'll just hang you, but long before you're hung there'll be another guy on the tractor, and he'll bump the house down. You're not killing the right guy."

"That's so," the tenant said. "Who gave you orders? I'll go after him. He's the one to kill."

"You're wrong. He got his orders from the bank...."

.....
 "But where does it stop? Who can we shoot?..."

The tenant is not satisfied with the excuse of economic determinism.

"I got to figure," the tenant said. "We all got to figure. There's some way to stop this. It's not like lightning or earthquakes. We've got a bad thing made by men, and by God there's something we can change."²⁴

Another criterion of immorality, besides the renouncing of free will and responsibility, is the failure to obey this rendering of the categorical imperative: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."²⁵ Steinbeck is clearly blaming those Californians, and anyone like them, who rationalize their immorality by denying the humanity of their victims:

...And the men of the town and the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad, as a

²⁴The Grapes of Wrath, pp.51-52.

²⁵Kant, p.319.

man must do before he fights. They said, These goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights.²⁶

The Grapes of Wrath, perhaps Steinbeck's greatest novel, is at the opposite pole from his non-blaming, so-called "non-teleological" attitude with its desideratum of acceptance, that we find in The Sea of Cortez. At one time, Steinbeck profoundly knew the nature of morality and free will. It is impossible for any human to take an absolutely non-teleological view without renouncing his own humanity. Though there are many false ends that men invent for themselves, there nevertheless is a moral necessity to see life as having purpose: the true teleology is to see human life as an end in itself -- Kant's criterion of morality.

²⁶The Grapes of Wrath, p.386.

CHAPTER VI

CANNERY ROW

Although Steinbeck had been able to write objectively about class and ideological antagonism, which was actually small-scale war, in In Dubious Battle, and although he was able to write a novel of righteous indignation which displayed both his profound moral awareness and his conscientious reliance on first-hand observation in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck was thrown into a kind of pessimism by the advent of World War II. Peter Lisca illustrates this with a quotation from Steinbeck's correspondence:

His state of mind is evident in a letter he wrote to Pascal Covici on New Year's Eve, 1940: 'So we go into this happy new year, knowing that our species has learned nothing, can as a race learn nothing -- that the experience of ten thousand years has made no impression on the instincts of the million years that preceded.'¹

As has been shown above, The Grapes of Wrath was a novel of hope; in The Sea of Cortez, which was being written in 1940, hope is contemptuously regarded as a "diagnostic trait of man" not shared by the author, who had achieved a lofty "non-teleological view."² The so-called "non-blaming" attitude of Steinbeck has been shown in the introductory chapter of this paper to constitute unwarranted sentimental pessimism and a loss of faith in the rationality

¹Lisca, p.179.

²Sea of Cortez, p.86 et pessim.

and free will of man -- an attitude of Weltschmerz unworthy of the author of The Grapes of Wrath. It is important to note that this change in Steinbeck's view of the world came about before the writing of Cannery Row.

Yet Cannery Row is of the same high calibre as Tortilla Flat, which it resembles in its structure and in its tragicomic style. It is less deterministic than Steinbeck's artistically successful Of Mice and Men. Cannery Row captures the understanding of the tragic nature of the human condition which was Ed Ricketts'. Inasmuch as Steinbeck had known Ricketts since the early 'thirties, it is apparent that Ricketts not only provided a model for Doc of Cannery Row, but also had had a definite, though indeterminate, influence on Tortilla Flat and Of Mice and Men. Steinbeck's artistic integrity was not immediately eroded by the specious determinism apparent in his pseudo-philosophic speculations in The Log from the Sea of Cortez.

Just as the many anecdotes included in Tortilla Flat are unified by both their thematic relevance to the basic tragicomic subject, and their association with a place, Danny's house, and a time, when the paisanos lived together with Danny, all dominated by the prevailing mood generated by the development of the mental sickness which ran its course in Danny's personality; so the many incidents in Cannery Row are unified by their thematic relevance to the basic tragicomic subject, and their association with a

locale, Cannery Row, and a time, when Mack and the boys were planning to do something nice for Doc, all dominated by the prevailing mood emanating from the "Palace Flophouse and Grill"³ and influenced by the intelligent reaction to it of Doc. In a chapter entitled "The Intricate Music of Cannery Row," Warren French describes the structure of the novel, pointing out that about half the chapters forward the main narrative, describing the development of the idea of a party for Doc, and half constitute related but self-contained anecdotes -- the two kinds of chapter more or less alternating.⁴

The basic plot is very simple: Mack and the boys, feeling a need to "do something nice for Doc," a desire based on altruistic affection with no more ulterior motive than the inherent enjoyment of the project, plan to put on a party for Doc. After numerous adventures and misadventures, the party finally is realized, taking place on Doc's premises. Only two things go wrong:- Doc is not present; and the party results in the destruction of Doc's property, both apparatus needed for

³"The benignant influence crept like gas through the Row. ...Perhaps some electrical finder could have been developed so delicate that it could have located the source of all this spreading joy and fortune. And triangulation might possibly have located it in the Palace Flophouse and Grill." John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (New York: Viking, 1963), p.144.

⁴French, pp.121-123.

his work and equipment necessary for his recreation -- his beloved phonograph records and player. Doc punishes Mack, and he and the boys do penance: Mack and the boys then decide to rectify matters by putting on another party for Doc. This one is successful only because Doc hears about it beforehand and makes necessary preparations. The final party is a balanced mixture of affectionate and destructive manifestations of uninhibited behaviour.

The basic theme of the novel is especially relevant to the topic of this paper, free will and determinism. The failure of the first party illustrates the fact that mankind, despite the best intentions of individuals, has a strong destructive impulse (in Freudian terminology, a "death-wish"). The success of the second party illustrates the fact that individuals who are aware of the unconscious destructive impulses of men can take them into account and prevent disaster, thereby promoting the expression of the other basic impulse of mankind, love (or Eros, in Freudian terminology), without resorting to enforced restrictions which repress the development of the deepest springs of man's nature. Intelligence, awareness of human motivations, recognition of autonomy, and the will to take responsible action can sometimes mean the difference between uninhibited human expression, on the one hand, and destruction, on the other.

A mere listing of some of the incidents from Camery

Row that illustrate aspects of this theme cannot do justice to the novel; however, that is all that is possible within the scope of this paper. First, there is the mutual exploitation of Mack and the boys and Lee Chong. Each opponent gets a slightly sadistic pleasure out of taking advantage of the other. One need not be a psychoanalyst to know that taking pleasure in economic rapacity has its origins in sadistic sexuality.⁵ Yet Mack and the boys and Lee Chong have a genuine affection for one another; the other basic human impulse, Eros, is not absent. First Mack exploits Lee Chong:

"I and my friends thought we'd ast you if we could move in there. We'll keep up the property," he added quickly. "Wouldn't let anybody break in or hurt anything. Kids might knock out the windows, you know --" Mack suggested. "Place might burn down if somebody don't keep an eye on it."

...In Mack's eyes there was good will and fellowship and a desire to make everyone happy. Why then did Lee Chong feel slightly surrounded?...⁶

Later Lee Chong exploits Mack and the boys:

Lee's mind nosed over the proposition like a mouse in a cheese cupboard. He could find nothing wrong with it. The whole thing was legitimate. Frogs were cash as far as Doc was concerned, the price was standard and Lee had a double profit. He had his five-frog margin and also he had the grocery mark-up....

"We go see flog," Lee said at last.

.....
...Jones was outraged a little later when the price of Coca-Cola went up from one to two frogs. In fact bitterness arose as the day wore on and prices went up. Steak, for instance -- the very best steak shouldn't have been more than ten frogs a pound but Lee set it at twelve and a half. Canned peaches

⁵"...ever' time since then when I hear a business man talkin' about service, I wonder who's gettin' screwed." The Grapes of Wrath, p.164.

⁶Cannery Row, p.8.

were sky high, eight frogs for a No.2 can. Lee had a stranglehold on the consumers. He was pretty sure that the Thrift Market or Holman's would not approve of this new monetary system. If the boy's wanted steak, they knew they had to pay Lee's prices.⁷

Another incident relevant to the theme of the necessity of intelligent awareness of both free will and the universality of the death wish is that of the depression of William the pimp. William thinks that he is somehow different from others because he is easily depressed and because he is ostracized by Mack and the boys. Moreover, once he has said that he will commit suicide, he feels compelled to act "consistently":

...William's hand went out for the ice pick and he held it easily in his hand. His eyes looked deeply into the Greek's dark eyes and he saw disbelief and amusement and then as he stared the Greek's eyes grew troubled and then worried. And William saw the change, saw first how the Greek knew he could do it and then the Greek knew he would do it. As soon as he saw that in the Greek's eyes William knew he had to do it. He was sad because now it seemed silly. His hand rose and the ice pick snapped into his heart. It was amazing how easily it went in.⁸

Other incidents and descriptions in the novel add their variations in mood and tempo to the underlying theme of the novel: There is the mysterious Chinaman who symbolizes death, loneliness, the unknown, the inscrutable in the commonplace, or what you will. There is Frankie the

⁷Cannery Row, pp.106-107.

⁸Ibid., p.17.

spastic boy who has a great need and capacity for love but who is doomed to an institution. There is the man with the dogs, repressed by a domineering wife, who at first hates and fears the anarchic Mack and the boys, only to succumb willingly to their uninhibited roughhousing. There is the loneliness and melancholy of Doc, recognized by Mack; for Doc's objectivity, his understanding, his compassion, the catholicity of his love of mankind -- in short, his wisdom -- sets him apart from others, in more than one sense. There is the serene beauty and yearning attractiveness of death, to the sensitive man, symbolized by the beautiful dead girl discovered in the sea by Doc. There is that bizarre manifestation of the Faustian will to achieve, flagpole skating, exploited by commerce, and tainted, like all man's attempts at heroic accomplishment, by bathos: "'How -- how do you -- go to the toilet?'"⁹ There is the enigmatic and terrifying dream of innocence and death by Henri the painter: "The devilish, smiling, dark handsome young man put a hand among the curls and the baby laughed gleefully and then the man tilted the chin and cut the baby's throat and the baby went right on laughing."¹⁰ There is the difficulty of reconciling moral goodness with success in a competitive society,

⁹Cannery Row, p.104.

¹⁰Ibid., p.124.

a conflict which is regarded as an intrinsically irresolvable dichotomy by Doc in his more pessimistic moods. There are Mack and the boys, who are at once "true philosophers" and born losers: "Ever'thing I done turned sour."¹¹ There is the mood of depression which can settle on a whole social group; and yet there is an optimism, just as inexplicable in its all-pervasiveness, which can supplant the former mood, like the next phase of a wave.

The final party provides a microcosm illustrating the extent to which group behaviour can be, and ought to be, controlled.

...It is...generally understood that a party has a pathology, that it is a kind of an individual and that it is likely to be a very perverse individual. And it is also generally understood that a party hardly ever goes the way it is planned or intended. This last, of course, excludes those dismal slave parties, whipped and controlled and dominated, given by ogreish professional hostesses. These are not parties at all but acts and demonstrations, about as spontaneous as peristalsis and as interesting as its end product.¹²

The party begins with an atmosphere of subdued formality. In time things loosen up: there is a minor fight, food and drink are enjoyed, music is put on the phonograph, dancing begins. Then Doc plays some of his "nice" music, a mood of poignant sadness develops, and Doc reads the Sanskrit erotic poem, "Black Marigolds." Just as a mood of lethargy is about to set in, a party of drunks bursts in, looking for

¹¹Cannery Row, p.119.

¹²Ibid., p.168.

Dora's brothel. A vigorous fight ensues, but Doc's preparations have prevented any serious damage. The approach of the police moves the fight outside, but the party soon resumes without inhibition and the police join in. The description ends with Doc sitting, Buddha-like, on the table, and a string of firecrackers exploding. Intelligent foresight has prevented disaster, and the absence of restrictions has allowed an uninhibited catharsis. The party illustrates the extent to which the life of any "individual," whether a party or a person, should be controlled.

The penultimate chapter tells of the life of a gopher which has no potentially dangerous or uncontrollable elements in it. Although the gopher has everything he needs for physical sustenance and comfort, he is unhappy. He misses love and hate, fellowship and conflict, sex and adventure. Being a wise gopher who understands life and is aware of his own autonomy, he makes a free-will decision. He moves.

The next day Doc is cleaning up after the party. He has a sense of true contentment because he knows that he has had his share of love and hate, fellowship and conflict, sex and adventure in the party of the preceding night, and is having a comparable experience in his life on Cannery Row. Cannery Row is as good a place for a man to live, as the dahlia garden where they put out traps every

night is for a gopher to live.

"Good time?" Lee asked. His brown eyes were a little inflamed in their pouches.

"Good time!" said Doc and he went back to the laboratory with his cold beer. He made a peanut butter sandwich to eat with his beer. It was very quiet in the street. No one went by at all. Doc heard music in his head -- violas and cellos, he thought. And they played cool, soft, soothing music with nothing much to distinguish it. He ate his sandwich and sipped her beer and listened to the music. When he had finished his beer, Doc went into the kitchen, and cleared the dirty dishes out of the sink....¹³

Doc reads the last stanzas of "Black Marigolds," and they express to him a wisdom beyond that of wise men, a communication with the rhythms of nature, the taste of life and of love.

Even now
I know that I have savored the hot taste of life
Lifting green cups and gold at the great feast.
Just for a small and a forgotten time
I have had full in my eyes from off my girl
The whitest pouring of eternal light.¹⁴

And this love poem is counterpointed by the scrambling white rats and the frowning rattlesnakes who will, in time, eat them.

¹³Cannery Row, p.179.

¹⁴Ibid., p.181.

CHAPTER VII

THE PEARL

If Steinbeck had not written The Log from the Sea of Cortez, one would be tempted to interpret The Pearl as a work of irony so consistent that there are no clues to warn the reader that the author's intention is diametrically opposite to the apparent one of the book. In theme and sympathy, The Pearl contravenes everything that Steinbeck had believed in and stood for, in his previous works, except for the phony "non-blaming" attitude and "non-teleological" view of The Log from the Sea of Cortez. The Pearl is the first of Steinbeck's fiction which is as faulty in its artistic conception as Chapter 14 of The Log is in its philosophical thought. Warren French regards it as "not just a disappointment but a betrayal."¹

The tone of the book would be a puzzle to anyone who had not read The Sea of Cortez, but had read, say Tortilla Flat, The Grapes of Wrath, and Cannery Row. It would seem to be a strange kind of irony, a perverse delight in pushing to the extreme beliefs that Steinbeck actually opposes, making them appear "inevitable". The self-martyring, hurt tone of a disillusioned once-angry individualist writing "sympathetically" about emasculating conformity and meek obedience is as perturbing to the reader who recognizes its source in the ideas expressed in

¹French, p.137.

The Sea of Cortez as it would be inexplicable to the average Steinbeck reader.

The novel illustrates Steinbeck's espoused "non-blaming" attitude in action. Steinbeck depicts a doctor who is at least as morally bad as any character he has yet created. Whereas Mr. Bolter of the Growers Association could rationalize his exploitation of the workers in In Dubious Battle by passing the responsibility to the "Association," calling the strikers "radicals," or labelling their action "un-American," and whereas health authorities and individual doctors in California could implicitly be allowed some excuse in their alleged ignorance of the suffering of the Okies, the doctor in The Pearl blatantly refuses to answer the direct appeal of a couple with a dangerously sick baby:

"It is a little Indian with a baby. He says a scorpion stung it."

The doctor put his cup down gently before he let his anger rise.

"Have I nothing better to do than cure insect bites for 'little Indians'? I am a doctor, not a veterinary."

"Yes, Patron," said the servant.

"Has he any money?" the doctor demanded.²

Steinbeck has explained in his prefatory comment, of course, that "as with all retold tales that are in people's hearts, there are only good and bad things and black and white

²John Steinbeck, The Pearl (New York: Viking, 1947), pp.17-18.

things and good and evil things and no in-between anywhere."³

If the reader, recalling the mock-legend technique of Tortilla Flat, looks forward to an artistically clever, ironic employment of this crude, melodramatic characterization, he will be disappointed. The evil doctor pursues his villainy. Having heard of Kino's finding the pearl, the doctor goes to look at Coyotito, the baby, whom he had refused to treat before. He administers a white powder, ostensibly to minimize the "relapse" from the scorpion bite, which he predicts. Several hours later, the baby is afflicted with severe cramps. The doctor returns to "save" the child by administering other medicine. The only thematic employment of the crude, melodramatic characterization of the doctor is the placing nearby of a description of big fishes eating little fishes, and one of Kino's ignoring a starving cur -- as if all exploitation and competition were amoral, natural, and not to be blamed:

...Everyone knew why the doctor had come. He was not good at dissembling and he was very well understood.

Out in the estuary a tight woven school of small fishes glittered and broke water to escape a school of great fishes that drove in to eat them....

The skinny black puppy with flame spots over his eyes came to Kino's door and looked in. He nearly shook his hind quarters loose when Kino glanced up at him, and he subsided when Kino looked away. The

³The Pearl, p.2.

puppy did not enter the house, but he watched with frantic interest while Kino ate his beans from the little pottery dish and wiped it clean with a corncake and ate the cake and washed the whole down with a drink of pulque.⁴

If one looks for a tongue-in-cheek tone in the following description of cheating pearl buyers, he will be disappointed; the point of the passage is that pearl buyers will be pearl buyers and that they cannot be judged, as responsible human beings, on the basis of ethics:

It was supposed that the pearl buyers were individuals acting along, bidding against one another for the pearls fishermen brought in. But this was a wasteful method, for often, in the excitement of bidding for a fine pearl, too great a price had been paid to the fishermen. This was extravagant and not to be countenanced. Now there was only one pearl buyer with many hands, and the men who sat in their offices and waited for Kino knew what price they would offer, how high they would bid, and what method each one would use. And although these men would not profit beyond their salaries, there was excitement among the pearl buyers, for there was excitement in the hunt, and if it be a man's function to break down a price, then he must take joy and satisfaction in breaking it as far down as possible. For every man in the world functions to the best of his ability, and no one does less than his best, no matter what he may think about it. Quite apart from any reward they might get, from any word of praise, from any promotion, a pearl buyer was a pearl buyer, and the best and happiest pearl buyer was he who bought for the lowest prices.⁵

Notice how former insights of Steinbeck's have been perverted, and how former ideals have been absolutely renounced. In the mutual exploitation of Lee Chong and Mack

⁴The Pearl, p.47.

⁵Ibid., pp.58-59.

and the boys of Cannery Row, Steinbeck had displayed the insight that persons do feel an "excitement in the hunt" and that they do "take joy and satisfaction" in getting the best of one another. But in Cannery Row there was a free contest between individuals. In The Pearl there is no "hunt" but a potting of a sitting duck; there is no contest between individuals, but the abuse of an individual by a group of "herd men."⁶ And Steinbeck "philosophically" observes that "a pearl buyer is a pearl buyer."

In previous works, female characters have been depicted sympathetically according to their courage and their acceptance of physical and moral necessity; Ma Joad of The Grapes of Wrath is the best example. Many of Steinbeck's women have been objectively depicted as weak but affectionate (like Lisa in In Dubious Battle), oversexed and social-status-hungry (like Sweets Ramirez in Tortilla Flat), romantic and afraid to face reality (Molly Morgan in The Pastures of Heaven). But in The Pearl, written originally for The Woman's Home Companion, Steinbeck tries to make a wise heroine out of a conservative and unimaginative woman with the personality and attitudes of a typical American housewife.

That Steinbeck was emasculating his writing to make it acceptable to the typical American housewife is apparent.

⁶A term Steinbeck applied to the Nazis he depicted in The Moon is Down.

His transcendental conception of "the Whole" appears in the form of safe domesticity:

...Juana sang softly an ancient song that had only three notes and yet endless variety of interval. And this was part of the family song too. It was all part. Sometimes it rose to an aching chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the Whole.⁷

When Kino is attacked and beaten by thugs who are after the pearl, Juana tells him to destroy it. Although this is an understandable reaction, it is obviously irrational. The thugs, not the pearl, are "evil". Destroying the pearl or throwing it away would achieve nothing unless it were done publicly. Juana is projecting the evil of individual men onto the pearl; she is advocating acquiescence to intimidation, and Steinbeck apparently sympathizes with this hysteria:

"Kino, this pearl is evil. Let us destroy it before it destroys us. Let us crush it between two stones. Let us -- let us throw it back in the sea where it belongs. Kino, it is evil, it is evil!"⁸

Steinbeck does not depict either Kino or his wife as being rational. The issue becomes a conflict of wills, a matter of who wears the pants in the family. "I am a man," he insists.

"Kino," she said huskily, "I am afraid. A man can be killed. Let us throw the pearl back into the sea."

"Hush," he said fiercely. "I am a man. Hush." And she was silent, for his voice was command. "Let

⁷The Pearl, p.6.

⁸Ibid., p.77.

us sleep a little," he said. "In the first light we will start. You are not afraid to go with me?"

"No, my husband."

His eyes were soft and warm on her then, his hand touched her cheek. "Let us sleep a little," he said.

Kino seems to get his own way, not because of the reasonableness of his opinion, but because Juana lets him.

Every woman reader would know that Juana still controls her husband.

Early the next morning Juana slips out with the pearl and is barely prevented by Kino from throwing it into the sea. She is intent on getting her own way. Kino beats her savagely. Every woman knows that men can be beasts, that women are cleverer and almost always get their own way by guile, and that their husbands have only brute force on their side. Juana's attitude towards her husband is more patronizing than awe-struck:

...Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength against the sea. Juana, in her woman's soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it. And yet it was this thing that made him a man, half insane and half god, and Juana had need of a man....⁹

But, after all, her Promethean "god" is merely trying to get a fair price for a pearl.

In time Kino learns that Juana was "right all along," that the pearl is "evil":

⁹The Pearl, p.83.

...then he held the great pearl in his hand. He looked into its surface and it was gray and ulcerous. Evil faces peered from it into his eyes, and he saw the light of burning. And in the surface of the pearl he saw Coyotito lying in the little cave with the top of his head shot away. And the pearl was ugly; it was gray, like a malignant growth. And Kino heard the music of the pearl distorted and insane.¹⁰

If Kino had listened to his wife, none of this would have happened. But now he sees his error, And Juana even lets him throw the pearl back.

Once it is clearly seen that The Pearl was written not to express Steinbeck's awareness of the truth, but hypocritically to court the approval of an intended popular audience, and an exclusively female one at that, then other aspects of the story fall into place. The pearl as a symbol, for example, is supposed to represent Kino's ambition, his integrity, his very "soul".¹¹ But this "Pearl of the World" is actually neither a Faustian obsession to conquer the universe nor a Christ-like ideal of loving the whole world. It is not something that a man builds within himself over many years, like objective rationality and artistic integrity (qualities Steinbeck had once laboured to develop). It is a prize, like winning the Irish sweepstakes, a matter of chance, not effort. Perhaps this is the way many women look

¹⁰The Pearl, p.121.

¹¹Ibid., p.93.

on their husband's success in his career -- not as something he worked to create, but as something she, the wife, hoped for and believed in. And when they do strike it rich, the pearl becomes respectability (getting married in the church), social status (new clothes), power and influence (a rifle), and projected ambition without effort or responsibility (education for their son).¹² It is a "guarantee of the future, of comfort, of security."¹³ And if the pearl, the summum bonum of life, is security, then Juana is absolutely right in her wish to throw away the actual pearl when it brings about a threat to their security.

In The Pearl Steinbeck has at last written a novel with a clear lesson, one which would have satisfied Pilon of Tortilla Flat, or Robert O. Ballou, who liked to pick out "some important story or argument" in his reading. The argument is that of The Log from the Sea of Cortez: resigned "acceptance" is a desideratum; one ought not to blame or use one's own moral judgment. Security can but be achieved by those who know their place:

"Before you were born, Kino,...the old ones thought of a way to get more money for their pearls. They thought it would be better if they had an agent who took all the pearls to the capital and sold them there...."

.....
 "I know," said Kino. "I have heard our father tell of it. It was a good idea, but it was against

¹²The Pearl, pp.36-37.

¹³Ibid., p.55.

religion, and the Father made that very clear. The loss of the pearl was a punishment visited on those who tried to leave their station. And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell."¹⁴

Kino had to learn the hard way, but, in time he learned the lesson of meek acceptance, the "wisdom" of security that his wife had known all along.

The Steinbeck reader is tempted to speculate on the possible personal reasons for Steinbeck's breach of artistic integrity, his "betrayal." Although such speculation may be beyond the bounds of literary criticism, nevertheless the student of literature cannot help being interested in the psychology of the artist. In any case, the following information is factual, and the reader may draw his own conclusion: On New Year's Eve of 1940, Steinbeck wrote a letter which provides evidence of his despair for mankind.¹⁵ In 1941 he published The Sea of Cortez which contains his philosophy of the "desideratum of acceptance" and his "non-blaming" attitude. In 1942 he was divorced from Carol Henning, his wife during the years of his highest artistic achievements. In 1943 he married Gwyn Verdon, a woman whom he was able to live with for only five years.¹⁶

¹⁴The Pearl, pp.62-63.

¹⁵Supra, p.88.

¹⁶The dedication of The Wayward Bus is: "For Gwyn."

In 1945 he published Cannery Row, by general critical assessment, the last of his greater artistic achievements, and "The Pearl of the World," the Woman's Home Companion version of The Pearl, a novel emasculated of all Steinbeck's insights and ideals and written to flatter the woman's point of view. It is impossible to know, of course, whether changes in his personal life influenced his sense of artistic value or vice versa. It is apparent, however, that these changes are correlative.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAYWARD BUS

Warren French's denunciation of The Pearl is a valuable piece of criticism which supplants Peter Lisca's faint praise of the book. His wholesale condemning of The Wayward Bus, Burning Bright, East of Eden, and Sweet Thursday,¹ however, needs a re-examination. Although these novels are all inferior to Steinbeck's best work -- particularly, Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, and Cannery Row -- nevertheless there are values in The Wayward Bus and East of Eden which, in fairness to Steinbeck, ought to be mentioned. Moreover, apart from their limited artistic value, they display thematic elements which are of interest to one concerned with Steinbeck's thought.

It has been shown above that Steinbeck was familiar with Freudian thought, in particular, the death wish theory. An extension of Freud's concept is dealt with in what Karl Menninger calls "the totality concept in medicine."² Just as Steinbeck has always thought transcendently, in terms of the Whole, so Menninger points out that the traditional Western conceptual division of the person into a mind and a body is not, in reality, as natural as it seems -- that

¹French, p.143.

²Karl Menninger, Man Against Himself (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1938), pp.309-317 et passim.

the strict distinction of mental and physical diseases is misleading -- that physical disease will always have its correlative mental manifestation, and vice versa -- and that the person with a strong death wish often "kills himself" by developing a fatal physical disease. Menninger explains how this might happen as follows:

Such a concept does not contradict anatomical or physiological facts. For years such a theory has been held by a few discerning and courageous men, notably George Groddeck in Europe, and Smith Ely Jelliffe in this country. We know that the deep insistent cravings of the personality which in neurological terms are designated "endogenous stimuli" are transmitted in various ways to organs as well as to muscles. The transmission may be chemical or physical, i.e., by hormones or by nerve fibers. Neural transmissions may be by way of voluntary or involuntary systems, both of which contain stimulating and inhibiting fibers. It is theoretically possible, therefore, that impulses arising from a trend toward or basic purpose of self destruction might be conveyed through the autonomous nervous system and carried out through the non-striated musculature, as well as in the more familiar form of voluntary nervous system impulses sent to striated musculature. This, then, would result in the injury of an organ as postulated above.³

The best example of Steinbeck's explicit grasp of such a concept is his characterization of Van Brunt in The Wayward Bus. Van Brunt is a constant pessimist, a compulsive prophet of doom and gloom. His whole purpose throughout the novel seems to be to goad Juan Chicoy, the driver, into getting the bus into such a position that disaster is imminent, at the same time assuring that the responsi-

³Menninger, p.311.

bility rests on Juan and not on Van Brunt himself. Van Brunt subconsciously wants to die but he will not take the responsibility for killing himself.

Actually Van Brunt is in the process -- if one believes the totality concept of medicine -- of killing himself anyway. Having lived a life of constant complaint, suspicion, hatred, and sexual repression, he has stimulated hormones and nerve fibers which have, over the years, built up the physical conditions which result in a stroke. It is interesting that Steinbeck depicts Van Brunt as being unusually concupiscent at this time; he is the archetypal "dirty old man":

...there was another thing that bothered him. The stroke had knocked the cap off one set of his inhibitions. He had suddenly reached powerful desires. He was pantingly drawn toward young women, even little girls. He couldn't keep his eyes and his thought from them, and in the midst of his sick desires he would burst into tears....⁴

This recalls the gigantesque surge of sexual prowess in Danny of Tortilla Flat, another Steinbeck character with a compulsive death wish, just before he committed suicide.

Mr. Pritchard's "description seems to come right out of Babbitt,"⁵ as Peter Lisca has observed, but his having an ulcer makes him a candidate for an analysis such as that applied to Van Brunt above. If such a psychosomatic

⁴The Wayward Bus, p.295.

⁵Lisca, p.233.

analysis is carried out, it immediately becomes clear that Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard must be dealt with together. Mrs. Pritchard is the dominant one of this pair, and it is her psychology which is the more fascinating. She is a woman, not unlike Juana of The Pearl, who knows that she can control her husband while seeming to be a paragon of demure wifely obedience. Steinbeck gets even for the self-imposed indignities he suffered for The Woman's Home Companion, by depicting in Mrs. Pritchard, apparently the perfect American lady, a monster who has made the life of her weak husband a living hell.⁶ The psychosomatic theme is brought out in that fact that Mrs. Pritchard's extreme prudishness and sexual repression is accompanied by "an acid condition which kept her from conceiving children without first artificially neutralizing her body acids."⁷ Mrs. Pritchard, who wears a sweet smile of long-suffering martyrdom for the hardships she bears -- such as the indignity of her husband's occasional sexual advances, and the pain of a case of indigestion -- is actually capable of whipping her husband into shape at any time by contracting one of her headaches and subtly suggesting the he is responsible for it. This is all accomplished subconsciously and intuitively by the little woman.

⁶The dedication of The Wayward Bus is: "For Gwyn."

⁷The Wayward Bus, p.63.

In Mrs. Pritchard, Steinbeck shifts from the modern method of characterization on the basis of the totality concept in medicine to an ancient method of characterization by means of physical attributes or defects. The concept of the Whole, that the body and soul reflect each other, is common to the two methods. Not only does Mrs. Pritchard have an acid condition that prevents conception, but also she is "handicapped by what is known as a nun's hood, which prevented her from experiencing any sexual elation from her marriage."⁸ All of the characters have physical peculiarities or idiosyncrasies.⁹ That Steinbeck was consciously using then according to the technique of middle English allegories is apparent not only from the introductory quotation from Everyman, but also from the descriptions of the concupiscent Pimples Carson's acne which recall the similar affliction of Chaucer's summoner:

...[Pimples] was a lank and slender-waisted boy of seventeen, with narrow shoulders and a long foxy nose and eyes that were pale in the morning and became greenish-brown later in the day. A golden fuzz was on his cheeks, and his cheeks were rivuleted and rotted and eroded with acne. Among the old scars new pustules formed, purple and red, some rising, and some waning. The skin was shiny with the medicines that were sold for this condition, and which do no good whatever.

.....
His eyes were long and narrow and slanted like the eyes of a sleepy wolf, and now in the early morning

⁸The Wayward Bus, p.63.

⁹Lisca, p.238.

they were almost sealed shut with mucus....His concupiscence was constant, and when it was not directly and openly sexual it would take to channels of melancholy, of deep and tearful sentiment, or of strong and musky religiosity.¹⁰

This description corresponds almost in every detail to that of the summoner:

A somonour was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
Of his visage children were afered.
Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon;
Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
That hym myghte helpen of his wheelkes white,
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.

.....
In dounger hadde he at his owene gise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed.
A gerland hadde he set upon his heed
As greet as it were for an ale-stake.
A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake.¹¹

Just as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales provides a cross-section of fourteenth century England, so Steinbeck attempted to present a cross-section of twentieth-century American society in his allegorical bus. Warren French feels that Steinbeck's allegory fails because he cannot decide whether to take an objective, "non-teleological" stance, or to take a moral point of view and write satire.¹²

¹⁰The Wayward Bus, pp.16-17.

¹¹Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, A.C. Cawley ed. Everyman's Library. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1958) general prologue, ll.623-668.

¹²French, p.144.

Actually, Steinbeck does take a moral point of view; he is writing satire; there is none of the fake "non-blaming" attitude of The Pearl. Moreover, the satire in The Wayward Bus, like that of The Canterbury Tales, goes beyond ridiculing petty vices and minor stupidities. In the attack on Van Brunt and on Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, Steinbeck is crying out against those whose lives are a living death. This recalls the "Pardoner's Tale," ironically told by a man who needs to heed its lesson himself, about the "rioters" who went out to seek Death and found him, and found their own deaths. There is also the "Parson's Tale" which describes the living death suffered by sinners in hell:

For, as seith Seint Gregorie, 'To wrecche caytyves
shal be deeth withoute deeth, and ende withoute ende,...
And therefore seith Seint John the Evaungelist: 'They
shullen folwe deeth, and they shul not fynde hym;
and they shul desiren to dye, and deeth shal flee fro
hem.'¹³

This is a perfect description of Mr. Pritchard, who suffering his wife's "punishment" of him--the guilt he must bear for her self-mutilation which ensued on his "rape" of her -- envies the dead Van Brunt:

..."Oh, God," he thought, "how do I get into these things? Why can't it be me here, dying, instead of this old man? He's never going to have to go through anything again."¹⁴

¹³The Canterbury Tales, "Parson's Tale", X, 428 ff.

¹⁴The Wayward Bus, p. 305.

In his understanding of the ultimate and universal springs of human evil and unhappiness, and in his apparent rediscovery of the medieval equivalent of the modern concept of the somatic manifestations of psychic rottenness, Steinbeck has achieved something of value in The Wayward Bus. The weakness of the book lies in the conception of the positive characters.

Peter Lisca includes Ernest Horton amongst the "saved" characters.¹⁵ Actually, however, he is, at best, in purgatory, and making no great effort to get out. Although he is more perceptive than Mr. Pritchard, this is not saying a great deal for him, for Mr. Pritchard is a weak man, constantly under the strain of his wife's subtle tyranny and his own disguised but not smothered guilt. Mr. Pritchard's whole life is built on rationalization, and if Ernest Horton can see that making a show of manufacturing a product which would threaten competition to the established clothing industries, only to get them to buy you out, is "high class blackmail",¹⁶ while Mr. Pritchard is shocked at such an interpretation -- that does not indicate exceptional self-awareness in Horton.

It takes Horton quite a while to see through Norma's obvious fantasy about Clark Gable:

Ernest looked at her a little skeptically. He knew the fantastic stories about waitresses who became dramatic stars overnight, but Norma didn't

¹⁵Lisca, p.236.

¹⁶The Wayward Bus, p.157.

have the bubs for it....But, then,...even if she didn't look it -- well, they could pad her out, and if her cousin was Clark Gable, why, that was an "in" you couldn't beat. That was the breaks.¹⁷

When he does finally see through it, he is tactful and kind only because there is no one else present to ridicule him for his apparent gullibility:

...Ernest was beginning to understand. The key to it was creeping into his brain. Norma was as pretty now as she was ever likely to be. There was dignity in her face, courage, and a truly great flow of love. There were only two things for Ernest to do -- to laugh at her or play along. If there'd been any other person in the room -- another man, for instance -- he probably would have laughed to protect himself from the other person's scorn, and he would have been ashamed and more boisterous because he could see that it was a powerful, pure, and overwhelming thing shining in this girl....¹⁸

Ernest Horton has long understood that his father's simple maxims of honesty and thrift are inadequate for living in the modern world. Like Doc of Cannery Row, Horton's father discovered a dichotomy in modern society between moral goodness and success: "'He found out that the most admired people weren't honest at all'".¹⁹ Unlike Doc, however, old Mr. Horton did not replace his inadequate moral rules with intelligent observation as a means towards wisdom and true moral awareness: "'...he died wondering, a kind of an awful wondering, because the two things he believed in didn't work out -- honesty and thrift.'" Like

¹⁷The Wayward Bus, p.55.

¹⁸Ibid., p.56.

¹⁹Ibid., p.277.

his father, Ernest Horton is morally lazy and will not take the responsibility of exercising his moral autonomy to discover the nature of morality. He wants someone to hand him some rules to replace those of his father: "'--honesty and thrift. It kind of struck me that nobody has put anything in place of those two.'"

One sympathizes with Horton's having to speak to Mr. Pritchard "as though he addressed a child"²⁰ when he replies to his cliché about having "the greatest respect for our soldiers" -- but not with Horton's subsequent bitter self-pity:

"Yea, I'm nervous," Ernest said. "Everybody's nervous. And I'll tell you something. If we've got to fight somebody again, you know what's the most awful thing? I'll go too. That's the most awful thing." And he got up and walked away, back in the direction from which the bus had come.

Although Horton can see many of the things that are wrong with American society, he is not prepared to do anything about them, even with respect to his own life. He earns his bread by pandering to the stupidities and banalities of American society. For example, he sells novelty whiskey dispensers in the form of toy toilets -- and he has a deluxe model at five times the price, for status seekers.²¹ In this respect, Horton is not unlike Steinbeck himself who, since the early 'forties, has written his

²⁰The Wayward Bus, p.278.

²¹Ibid., p.190.

share of blatantly commercial, artistically inferior, literature: The Pearl, The Short Reign of Pippin IV, Travels with Charley.²²

If Ernest Horton is not a character who has taken on the responsibility of autonomy or moral free will, nevertheless he is not the main hero of the book. Perhaps Juan Chicoy will stand up to analysis as well as, say, Doc of Cannery Row.

As the driver, Juan Chicoy has the responsibility of getting the allegorical bus to the end of its pilgrimage, San Juan de la Cruz. A typical Steinbeck hero, Juan has technical competence, self-awareness, insight into and amused acceptance of the follies of others, and sexual prowess. His most important quality, however, is his sense of responsibility. On the dashboard of the bus he has a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe which he regards not as a talisman, nor as a symbol of an autocratic divinity, nor yet as a sweet and naïve goddess who can be bribed. She is a wise and knowing friend who cannot be fooled by

²²Warren French expresses a prevailing critical evaluation of Steinbeck's work in such phrases as these: "John Steinbeck is not critically fashionable today....If the will of some literary historians prevailed, he would be relegated to a footnote...Undeniably Steinbeck's novels since World War II have failed to live up to his earlier works. [p.7]" "Certainly in manufacturing The Pearl Steinbeck seems not to have had his mind on what he wished to say..., but his eye on what the market would bear. If he tried to appeal to a general audience, he succeeded; for the easily read Pearl has been one of his most popular books. From the viewpoint of admirers of The Grapes of Wrath and Cannery Row, however, it is not just a disappointment but a betrayal. [p.137]"

rationalization. She is a symbol of Juan's well-developed and rational super-ego, the external representation of his internalized sense of responsibility.

Juan sometimes dreams of leaving his wife and his business and returning to the imagined serenity of his boyhood home, Mexico. In this respect, he is not unlike Steinbeck himself, who occasionally deserves the epithet of "primitivist" (especially in The Pearl). Juan even goes so far as to abandon the bus and his charges and set off on foot for the land of the lotus eaters, as he conceives it. A good roll in the hay with Mildred Pritchard, however, brings him back to reality.

This brings up another outstanding quality of Juan, his sexuality. Although he does not love his wife, a neurotic woman with a female kind of Faustian personality -- (she sees the whole world in terms of herself against the "other") -- nevertheless he needs her as a sexual partner and cook -- (she can bake beans as well as any Mexican woman) -- and he realizes that she desperately needs him. It is this latter factor which activates Juan's conscience and sense of responsibility, so that he does not actually abandon the bus, his passengers, and his whole way of life.

It is significant that what finally moves Juan to return to the bus is his little affair with Mildred. This sexual encounter is absolutely in terms of "hard sex." Both parties are as coldly rational and anti-romantic about the

whole thing as is possible without calling it off. It is a loveless liaison just as Juan's marriage is loveless. Actually Juan respects Mildred more than his wife; indeed he treats her as he would a man with whom he was transacting routine business, making no attempt to be gallant at all; he respects her for her rationality. The sexual discharge seems to bring him back to reality -- (perhaps it reminds him of his wife and his obligation to her) -- for he subsequently heads back to the bus.

In order to be a fulfilling experience sexual intercourse must, of course, be an expression of Eros, a satisfying of the pleasure principle, an unleashing of libidinal energy. The completely de-romanticized affair that Juan has with the mannish Mildred could not be very satisfying. Nor could the regular intercourse he has with his compulsive wife, no matter how strenuous it might be.

It is this genital sexuality without love that casts a pall over the whole novel. Along with the odour of death that hangs over Van Brunt, and, once detected behind the sweetness, is emitted from Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, this loveless hard sex gives the novel a tone of repulsive cynicism. If the Freudian interpretation given above for Of Mice and Men is correct, Steinbeck believed Freud's opinion that complete realization of Eros is inherently impossible in modern civilization. In The Wayward Bus, however, Steinbeck

depicts this view of society in such an extreme form that it distorts objectivity, and makes America seem like hell itself.

Warren French has said of the novel that its weakness lies in its faulty allegory: "...almost all of Steinbeck's books had been allegories: some good, some bad. Why is this one best described as indifferent?"²³ The allegory is not merely indifferent, but bad, because of its cynicism. Unlike The Canterbury Tales, its model, which shows an imperfect but somehow loveable human species in fourteenth century England, The Wayward Bus shows America as a land where no love can live. It is bad allegory because it fails to give a complete picture of American society; Steinbeck's vision is distorted.

What the novel proves, however, is that free will is not enough. Juan is accurately depicted as a man of moral responsibility, of duty; but if this is the highest level of humanity that one can achieve in America, then God help us!

²³French, pp.143-144.

CHAPTER IX

EAST OF EDEN; CONCLUSION

Of his novel East of Eden, Steinbeck himself said, "I think everything else I have written has been, in a sense, practice for this....If East of Eden isn't good, then I've been wasting my time. It has in it everything I have been able to learn about my art or craft or profession in all these years."¹ If Steinbeck means by his "craft" his literary technique, then this statement is arrant nonsense. He may mean by "art" or "profession", however, his thematic outlook, his world view. If that is so, there is some meaning in the statement -- despite the technical inferiority of the novel -- for the novel contains an explicit rendering of a theme which has been implicit in most of his previous writings: free will and determinism.

Peter Lisca has shown very well why East of Eden fails as a novel. For one thing, it lacks a coherent structure: "Steinbeck's attempts to impose an order on his diverse materials proved unsuccessful, and...because he tried to say too many things at once, Steinbeck failed to achieve fictional concentration."² Secondly, Steinbeck indulges in pseudo-poetic diction and unnatural syntax in order to give

¹Bernard Kale, "The Author," Saturday Review, 35 (September 20, 1952), p.11, cited by Lisca, p.275.

²Lisca, p.263.

the impression of profundity to the book.³

Most important for the purposes of this paper, Steinbeck's moral philosophy is confused:

The moral philosophy of the narrator is no more convincing than its structural function, and at times seems to be in direct variance with the action. While Samuel and the Chinese servant, Lee, explicate the Cain and Abel story, and thus the Trask story, as giving evidence of man's free will in choosing between good and evil, Lee later denies free will to Adam Trask: "He couldn't help it, Cal. That's his nature. It was the only way he knew. He didn't have any choice." The author himself denies free will to the novel's most wicked character -- Cathy: "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?...It is my belief that Cathy was born with the tendencies, or lack of them, which drove and forced her all her life. Some balance wheel was misweighted, some gear out of ratio. She was not like other people, never was from birth."⁴

Thus, even though East of Eden may represent to Steinbeck the culmination of his moral thinking, in that it deals explicitly with free will, yet it fails in this aspect as it does in its technical qualities.

It has been shown above that the theme of free will and determinism, or the possibility of choice between good and evil, was implicit in most of Steinbeck's artistically successful novels. Tortilla Flat depicted in Danny a compulsive personality absolutely unable to control his

³Lisca, pp.269-273.

⁴Ibid., p.267.

actions, and in Danny's friends, men who usually avoided moral choice by rationalizing. Yet, although Danny represented those mentally ill persons who are practically incapable of becoming responsible individuals, nevertheless the paisanos often displayed loveable human traits and occasionally manifested that sense of right and wrong which is the basis of morality and which is within the grasp of the simplest man.

In Dubious Battle depicted group man as an unpredictable monster which swallows up the free will and moral awareness of its cell-like members. Yet the primal moral awareness was apparent in Jim, London, and especially Doc.

Of Mice and Men has been interpreted in this paper as a Freudian allegory which presents the theory that man's society, by its very nature, represses the fulfillment of the happiness of the individual. Assuming that this theory were the truth, it nevertheless would have no direct bearing on moral choice: an individual can be repressed and unhappy, and yet have a strong sense of moral duty and responsibility. Yet it has this related significance: acting morally becomes much easier if the individual has a healthy love of humanity, a condition which cannot exist if the source of love is dammed up.

The Grapes of Wrath is a profound and moving moral statement. It challenges the argument of economic determinism which is so often used by those who need to rationalize

their immoral acts. It shows the development of a strong sense of moral duty in a hard-pressed family, and ends with a scene symbolically linking physical necessity, moral necessity, and human love or Eros.

Cannery Row depicts in Doc a man who values humanity greatly, as it is represented in the denizens of Cannery Row, and who is admired and, indeed, loved by them. Yet Doc's awareness goes far beyond his own sense of responsibility and love. He feels deeply the tragic aloneness of man, the absence of justice in an imperfect world, and the impossibility of absolute security. Most important, he recognizes the fundamental morbid or self-destructive instinct of man, not only in others, but also in himself. Yet he is able, through foresight, to prevent disaster and allow the expression of uninhibited (and unpredictable) libido, with a minimum of restraint, both in the particular case of a party, and, more generally, in his life on Cannery Row.

The Pearl is a denial of all Steinbeck's previous insight into the nature of man's free will and moral responsibility. It provides an example of the false "non-blaming" attitude that Steinbeck claimed to hold in The Sea of Cortez. It makes a heroine out of a stupid and complacent woman. It sentimentalizes the act of rejecting the challenges of life. If the novelist's artistic integrity has been a major part of his self-hood, as it was for

Steinbeck, then his violation of it is itself, in a sense, an immoral act, for it breaks the Kantian imperative: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person⁵ or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."

The Wayward Bus depicts in Van Brunt and the Pritchards persons who have long since rejected moral responsibility and who have let the death wish engulf their humanity. It depicts in Ernest Horton a person who still has insight but who wants easy moral rules to live by and who panders to American banality. It depicts in Juan Chicoy, supposedly an ideal person, a sense of moral responsibility but an absence of love and fulfillment. It is an extreme statement of the Freudian theory of the necessity of repression in modern civilization and represents an irresponsibly cynical attitude on the part of the novelist.

In his first novel, The Cup of Gold, Steinbeck had depicted a Faustian man in Henry Morgan. How ironic it is that Steinbeck was later to make, in his own a life, a Faustian pact: by prostituting his artistic integrity in The Pearl for popular approval, he had "sold his soul," for he was never to write another great book.⁶

⁵Italics mine.

⁶Warren French's opinion (p.137 ff.) is largely accepted by the writer of this thesis and is in accordance with a prevailing critical attitude towards Steinbeck.

If one were to ask now "Just where does Steinbeck stand on the issue of free will and moral responsibility?" a simple answer would not be forthcoming. In the first place, one does not simply vote "for" or "against" free will. If one is a philosophic thinker, he analyzes the concepts involved, and comes to some understanding of the extent to which man is free and the sense in which he is determined. If one is a novelist, he must work out the question more as a theme in his novels than as a problem of analysis. The novelist's task may be compared to a dialectical thinker's thesis, antithesis, synthesis; or to a musical composer's structuring of theme and counter-theme, mood and counter-mood.

In specific novels, Steinbeck has produced valuable artistic creations which work out the theme of free will and moral responsibility with honesty. These include Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath and Cannery Row. On the other hand, The Pearl is a repudiation of all his former insights and a compromising of his integrity. Several of his more recent writings have been only partial successes: The Wayward Bus is honest but narrowly pessimistic in its vision, and fails to see the complete view of society that is presented in its model, The Canterbury Tales; East of Eden affirms free will and moral responsibility, but it "doth protest too much," and it is not dialectical, but

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merely inconsistent in its world view. There is a correlation between aesthetic value and moral insight in the novels of John Steinbeck, for those novels which stand up best to analysis of the philosophic themes involved are also those approved of by prevailing critical judgment.

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