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A STUDY OF JOHN STEINBECK'S MONTEREY TRILOGY

THESIS

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247

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John Steinbeck's three novels Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are significant in the Steinbeck canon. Although having many elements typical of Steinbeck's fiction in general, these novels, which are referred to as the Monterey Trilogy, are unified by common elements that are either unique or handled in an unusual manner. These common elements are setting, tone, themes, structure, and characters. The novels are complementary and form a unified whole. Just as the setting reflects the evolution of Monterey over a period of almost thirty years, so do the other elements reveal a shift in emphasis or attitude indicative of Steinbeck's own changing attitudes. The concluding chapter discusses the particular significance of the Monterey Trilogy as a measure of Steinbeck's ability as artist and craftsman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. STEINBECK'S MONTEREY NOVELS: A NEGLECTED TRILOGY	1
II. COMMON SETTING IN THE MONTEREY TRILOGY	11
III. COMIC TONE AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT	21
IV. THEMES IN THE MONTEREY TRILOGY	43
V. STRUCTURE AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT IN THE MONTEREY NOVELS	65
VI. UNIFICATION THROUGH FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERS	83
VII. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MONTEREY TRILOGY IN THE STEINBECK CANON	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108

CHAPTER I

STEINBECK'S MONTEREY NOVELS: A NEGLECTED TRILOGY

A survey of criticism of John Steinbeck's works reveals a surprising lack of recognition of his three novels, Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday, as a trilogy. However, even though they were written approximately ten years apart, these three novels have a number of common elements which serve to unify them, namely, setting, tone, themes, structure, and characters. It is these common elements with which this study will be concerned, offering a discussion of each of the elements as support for the contention that the novels, which will be referred to here as the Monterey Trilogy, are, in fact, a trilogy. These elements will be dealt with in separate chapters in order to maintain a sharper focus on each of the elements in turn. A concluding chapter will discuss the significance of the trilogy in the Steinbeck canon. The purpose of this study, then, is to shed light on a heretofore neglected area of Steinbeck criticism by showing that Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are a trilogy and that they are important in an appraisal of Steinbeck's fiction.

No doubt the neglect of the Monterey Trilogy stems from the unevenness of Steinbeck criticism in general. As Richard

Astro says, "Only The Grapes of Wrath has received the kind of critical treatment most of Steinbeck's works deserve."¹ A brief glance at Tetsumaro Hayashi's John Steinbeck: A Concise Bibliography (1930-65) supports Astro's statement. In the sixty-page section wherein items are categorized according to individual works, fifteen pages (twenty-five per cent) list reviews and critical essays (including books, articles, and unpublished dissertations) concerning The Grapes of Wrath. Entries for Of Mice and Men, which ranks second among Steinbeck's works as a favorite topic with critics, fill only five pages. Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row are third, with three pages of entries listed for each--with eighteen critical essays for the former and seventeen for the latter, including essays in book-length surveys of all of Steinbeck's fiction.² For thirty-five years since the publication of Tortilla Flat and twenty-five years since the publication of Cannery Row, this coverage hardly indicates overwhelming recognition. Nonetheless, these two earlier novels outrank Sweet Thursday, about which little of a critical nature has been written. Hayashi lists twenty-three entries (one and a half pages), seventeen of which are simply book reviews. Of the six essays listed, four are treatments in surveys, leaving only two articles whose primary purpose is to deal with Sweet Thursday.³ One of these is Charles R. Metzger's "Steinbeck's Version of the Pastoral" which discusses pastoral form in Sweet Thursday;⁴ the other

is the inconsequential "Cannery Row Revisited" in which Ward Moore, under the guise of reviewing the novel (which was published in 1954 but set in 1945-46), goes to great length to show how different is Steinbeck's Cannery Row from the Cannery Row that Moore knows.⁵

Scholarship since 1965 has not altered the picture of unevenness in Steinbeck criticism. The Grapes of Wrath continues to be the favorite topic. However, the Monterey novels have not been entirely neglected. Stanley Alexander's two articles "Cannery Row: Steinbeck's Pastoral Poem"⁶ and "The Conflict of Form in Tortilla Flat,"⁷ Howard Levant's "Tortilla Flat: The Shape of John Steinbeck's Career,"⁸ Robert M. Benton's "The Ecological Nature of Cannery Row,"⁹ and Robert De Mott's "Steinbeck and the Creative Process: First Manifesto to End the Bringdown Against Sweet Thursday"¹⁰ indicate that these three novels still receive some critical attention. Nonetheless, no critic has yet explored the peculiar relationship they share with one another or their significance in the work and life of John Steinbeck. It would seem, then, that a serious consideration of the Monterey Trilogy is long overdue.

The three novels punctuate periods in Steinbeck's life. Tortilla Flat was published in May 1935, bringing Steinbeck fame and success and ending ten years of struggling for recognition. Almost ten years later, Cannery Row (January 1945) was published following a period in Steinbeck's life

which included literary success, dissolution of his first marriage, a second marriage, and experiences as a correspondent during World War II. In June 1954, Sweet Thursday, the sequel to Cannery Row, was published. This novel ended another ten-year period that interestingly paralleled the preceding ten years. Literary recognition continued, but Steinbeck's writings became increasingly journalistic; non-fiction took precedence over fiction. He was divorced from his second wife and married his third; and he continued to work as a correspondent in a manner of speaking, for although he was not actively involved with the Korean conflict, he was on the front lines of a different war--the Cold War--which resulted in A Russian Journal.

However, the fact that each of these novels marked a turning point in Steinbeck's life and work has been entirely overlooked by critics. Moreover, only a casual connection among the novels is admitted, and certainly no one has seriously considered them a trilogy. In fact, the three most important works of Steinbeck criticism--Peter Lisca's The Wide World of John Steinbeck (1958), Warren French's John Steinbeck (1961), and Joseph Fontenrose's John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (1963)--specifically note that any similarities between one of the novels and another (none notes similarities among all three) are superficial and are of little value in understanding the works. Lisca notes that in both Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row "the

structure . . . is loose and episodic," that in both novels "a thin thread of plot . . . is broken up by many interchapters," that "both novels have as protagonists a tight little group with its own moral standards . . . who have retreated from society," and that "the structure and mores of this little group serve as commentaries on the structure and mores of that society which they have abandoned."¹¹ Yet he says, "Despite these similarities . . . Cannery Row is not in any important sense a mere repetition of Tortilla Flat."¹² This statement, of course, is true; and it is this point which is one of the basic contentions of this study, as will be explained later. However, Lisca then launches into an analysis of Cannery Row without any further consideration of the similarities between it and Tortilla Flat. If he sees any significant relationship between the two novels, he fails to mention it. In regard to Sweet Thursday, Lisca says that "it is as essentially different from Cannery Row as that novel was from the earlier Tortilla Flat."¹³ Certainly Lisca does not consider the novels a trilogy.

French ignores the humorous tone of Cannery Row and stresses the serious themes of the novel. He calls it an allegory and makes no mention of its having any connection with Tortilla Flat.¹⁴ While admitting that Steinbeck uses the setting, characters, and "framework" of Cannery Row for Sweet Thursday, French discounts any valid similarities and emphasizes major differences between the two novels with no suggestion of a trilogy.¹⁵

Fontenrose says of Cannery Row that it "superficially . . . resembles Tortilla Flat," suggesting a comparison between the Cannery Row "American bums" and the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. Then follows a consideration of the mythical theme of Cannery Row, disregarding any other similarities between the two novels.¹⁶ About Sweet Thursday Fontenrose says, "It is ostensibly a sequel to Cannery Row."¹⁷ He believes that a "serious moral undertone reveals that Sweet Thursday was deliberately written to reject the teaching of Cannery Row and replace it with a newer gospel."¹⁸ This is similar to Lisca's opinion that Cannery Row is not a "repetition of Tortilla Flat," the point to be dealt with later in clarifying the peculiar relationship which makes the three novels a trilogy, albeit not copies of one another.

Only two critics suggest a definite link among the three works. In comparing Steinbeck's characters to the social protesters of the 1960's and early 1970's, James Gray asks, "What can the dissidents of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday be called but dropouts from society who have the same reasons for rejecting old patterns of belief as do members of the hippie generation?"¹⁹ Benton observes that "the 1954 publication of Sweet Thursday impressed most reviewers as a disappointing reversion to the vein of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row."²⁰ Neither of these comments can be construed as suggesting that the three novels be called a trilogy.

In discussing the common elements peculiar to Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday, it must be noted that no attempt will be made to supply an exhaustive list. Instead, the purpose of this study is to deal with major elements. The point to be made here is that the significance of the novels is not dependent on obscure details, making the lack of critical recognition of the three novels as a trilogy even more surprising. Areas of discussion, then, will include setting, tone, themes, structure, and characters.

Any consideration of elements common to the three novels is not intended to suggest that each subsequent novel is a repetition of its predecessor. Most critics agree with Steinbeck, who said, "My experience in writing has followed an almost invariable pattern. . . . I have not written two books alike."²¹ The briefest survey will confirm this statement; and certainly Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are not exceptions. Even those elements offered here are not identical, but they are similar enough to indicate a relationship among the novels. Cannery Row is not a rewrite of Tortilla Flat, nor is Sweet Thursday a rewrite of Cannery Row. Instead, each novel is complementary, and together they form a whole, as an investigation of the common elements will reveal.

Thus, differences, contrary to the implications of Lisca, French, and Fontenrose, do not nullify similarities. The

interesting characteristic of the Monterey Trilogy is that it is not static; the novels reflect change while at the same time presenting a unity. A careful study reveals that differences which appear to be contradictory are, in fact, evolutionary. The following chapters will show that the setting, tone, themes, structure, and characters of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday link the three novels together in a significant way to form a trilogy which is important to the overall understanding of Steinbeck's fiction.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹"Advice to a Graduate Student," Steinbeck Quarterly, 6, No. 2 (Spring 1973), 45.

²Tetsumaro Hayashi, John Steinbeck: A Concise Bibliography (1930-65) (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1967), pp. 90-152.

³Hayashi, pp. 140-143.

⁴Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (1960), 115-124.

⁵Nation, 16 Oct. 1954, pp. 325-327.

⁶Western American Literature, 2 (1968), 281-295.

⁷American Literature, 40 (1968), 58-66.

⁸PMLA, 85 (1970), 1087-1095.

⁹in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, Ed. Richard Astro and Tetsumaro Hayashi (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 131-139.

¹⁰in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, pp. 157-178.

¹¹Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p. 199.

¹²Lisca, Wide World, p. 199.

¹³Lisca, Wide World, p. 277.

¹⁴Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne, 1961), pp. 120-136.

¹⁵French, pp. 156-158.

¹⁶Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), pp. 101-108.

¹⁷Fontenrose, p. 127.

¹⁸Fontenrose, p. 128.

¹⁹John Steinbeck (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 6.

²⁰Benton, p. 131.

²¹John Steinbeck, "Critics, Critics, Burning Bright," Steinbeck and His Critics, ed. E. W. Tedlock, Jr., and C.V. Wicker (1957; rpt. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1969), p. 46.

CHAPTER II

COMMON SETTING IN THE MONTEREY TRILOGY

The most obvious common element in the Monterey Trilogy is setting. Although the large majority of Steinbeck's novels are set in California, only Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are set in Monterey. Monterey and its environs are mentioned in other novels, but only in these three is the action contained there. The Monterey Peninsula was home to Steinbeck, perhaps in a way that no other place could be. Born in Salinas, just a few miles from the peninsula, he became familiar with the area as he grew up. When he married the first time, he and his bride, the former Carol Henning, settled in Pacific Grove, a community on the northwestern tip of the peninsula and less than five miles from the town of Monterey. It was while living in Pacific Grove that Steinbeck experienced his first literary success with the publication of Tortilla Flat. Although he lived there only five or six years, moving about fifty miles north to Los Gatos because of his wife's health, he continued to feel the ties which bound him to the peninsula. Twice he returned to Monterey for settings.

Today, the city limits of the communities of Carmel, Pacific Grove, and Monterey have merged and the primary

industry of the peninsula is tourism. Cannery Row is now a tourist attraction which stands not as a tribute to the industry which gave it its name, but as a memorial to the man who immortalized it in fiction. Tortilla Flat, if it even existed as such, is not to be found. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine how much of Steinbeck's Monterey is authentic and how much is romanticized. Certainly, as Lisca points out, "his [Steinbeck's] books have drawn heavily on actual incidents he either knows about or has experienced at first hand."¹ But the fact that each of the Monterey novels is set several years earlier than the time in which it was written and published confuses the issue. Nevertheless, the descriptions in the novels present a believable picture and a sense of history as Monterey evolves from a semi-rural town in 1918 to a town whose life is dependent on the fish canneries in the late thirties to an almost ghost town after the death of that livelihood in the mid-forties.

Steinbeck first introduces Monterey in the preface of Tortilla Flat:

Monterey sits on the slope of a hill, with a blue bay below it and a forest of tall dark pine trees at its back. The lower parts of the town are inhabited by Americans, Italians, catchers and canners of fish. But on the hill where the forest and town intermingle, where the streets are innocent of asphalt and the corners free of street lights, the old inhabitants of Monterey are embattled. . . . These are the paisanos.²

And although the bulk of the action in the novel takes place in the "uphill district . . . called Tortilla Flat," where

the paisanos "live in wooden houses set in weedy yards, and the pine trees from the forest are about the houses" (p. 2), these inhabitants of Tortilla Flat are residents of and move freely through Monterey proper; for in those days Monterey took life in its stride and embraced all as it lolled leisurely on the shore overlooking the bay. Here "afternoon came down as imperceptibly as age comes to a happy man, . . . the wind . . . blew softly in from the bay, bringing all manner of fine kelp odors," and "the pines waved slowly and voluptuously" while "hens in a hundred hen yards complained in placid voices of their evil lot" (p. 29). It was a town where three shifts of lonely fishermen traded places on the rocks with the changing tides and "menders of nets in the vacant lots" took time out to roll cigarettes while "fat ladies . . . were trundled in overpowered motorcars toward tea and gin fizzes at the Hotel del Monte," and Hugh Machado, the tailor, hung his "Back in Five Minutes" sign in his shop door in the middle of the afternoon and "went home for the day" (p. 29).

As evening approached, activity increased somewhat as preparations were made for the night. The Italian fishermen folded their nets, the group of conversationalists moved from their afternoon post at the post office to see the arrival of the "Del Monte Express from San Francisco," and "the Palace Drug Company wound up its awnings." The eating, drinking, and dancing establishments prepared for the evening's

merriment as "Mrs. Guttierrez cut little chiles into her enchilada sauce," Rupert Hogan watered his "after midnight" gin and peppered "his early evening whiskey," and Bullet Rosendale arranged the courtesy pretzels at the El Paseo dancing pavilion. Meanwhile, ninety-year-old little Miss Alma Alvarez presented her daily bouquet of pink geraniums to the Virgin on the outer wall of the church of San Carlos. And in the "Methodist village of Pacific Grove," the "vice and prostitution of Monterey" was described "with energy and color" to a meeting of the W. C. T. U. (p. 30).

It was this Monterey that the paisanos knew and to which they belonged. They knew the wharf where Danny's drunken ethnic slurs were received good-naturedly by the Italian fishermen. They knew the beaches where flotsam meant another bottle of wine could be purchased from Torrelli. They knew the back doors of the restaurants where they scavenged and stole food. Above all, they knew the Monterey city jail where Tito Ralph, the jailer, joined them in their cells for wine and conversation and they felt a sense of belonging.

However, by the late thirties, Monterey was no longer the Monterey familiar to the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. It had become the Monterey of Cannery Row, bustling with activity centered around the fish canneries, which had become the lifeblood of the town. Steinbeck calls Cannery Row "a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light,

a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream."³ More specifically, though, "Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants, and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses" (p. 1). The idyllic Monterey of Tortilla Flat is no more; the by-products of progress have replaced the waving pines and the placidly complaining hens. The leisurely pace of old Monterey, which quickened only slightly with the prospect of the night's convivialities, has been replaced by the rush of activity surrounding the canneries by day, a frenzied activity emphasized by contrast with the relaxed atmosphere of the nights and deserted beauty of the early morning.

For Cannery Row the day begins when "the purse-seiners waddle heavily into the bay blowing their whistles," followed by the answering "scream" of the whistles from the canneries calling men and women from "all over town" who "scramble into their clothes and come running." The upper classes represented by "superintendents, accountants, [and] owners" come in "shining cars" and "disappear into offices"; but the real work of the canneries--the cleaning, cutting, cooking, canning, and packing of fish--is done by the "Wops and Chinamen and Polaks" who "pour" in wearing "trousers and rubber coats and oilcloth aprons" (p. 1). Then "the whole street rumbles and groans and screams and rattles. . . . The

canneries rumble and rattle and squeak until the last fish is cleaned and cut and cooked and canned and then the whistles scream again and the dripping, smelly, tired Wops and Chinamen and Polaks . . . straggle out and droop their ways up the hill into the town . . ." (pp. 1-2).

After the frantic pace of the day, Cannery Row reverts to "normal." The residents of the Row emerge, the "bums . . . to sit on the rusty pipes in the vacant lot," Dora's girls "for a bit of sun," Doc to "stroll" from his laboratory to Lee Chong's for his evening beer, and Henri the painter to nose "through the junk in the grass grown lot for some part or piece of wood or metal he needs for the boat he is building" (p. 2). Like the paisanos of Tortilla Flat, the inhabitants of Cannery Row spend their nights sharing philosophy and drinks with friends. But early morning in Cannery Row is "the time of the pearl":

In the gray time after the light has come and before the sun has risen, the Row seems to hang suspended out of time in a silvery light. The street lights go out, and the weeds are a brilliant green. The corrugated iron of the canneries glows with the pearly lucence of platinum or old pewter. No automobiles are running then. The street is silent of progress and business. And the rush and drag of the waves can be heard as they splash in among the piles of the canneries. It is a time of great peace, a deserted time, a little era of rest (p. 52).

No doubt that "little era of rest" was a welcome time for the workers of Monterey as they awaited the scream of the cannery whistles signalling the start of another work-day. But by the end of World War II, the time of Sweet

Thursday, the "little era" had become an eternity. The war had come and Monterey, like the rest of America, answered the call of patriotism. The canneries did their bit "by getting the limit taken off fish and catching them all." Though their motives were admirable, the fish were gone. "The pearl-gray canneries of corrugated iron were silent and a pacing watchman was their only life. The street that once roared with trucks was quiet and empty."⁴ Doc returned from the war to a dying Cannery Row. "People were gone, or changed, and that was almost like being gone. Names were mentioned sadly, even the names of the living" (p. 2), and "Monterey had changed, and so had Cannery Row and its denizens" (p. 16).

Even the carefree paisano of Tortilla Flat, whom Steinbeck re-introduces in Sweet Thursday, has changed. In the person of Joseph and Mary Rivas, he has become a profiteer. The fact that he is not a local but an outcast from Los Angeles hardly changes the picture. The old Tortilla Flat paisanos might have appreciated his ingenuity in raising marijuana in the city Plaza under the noses of the Los Angeles Police Department, though they would surely have questioned his industriousness, but none of them would have stooped to encroaching on the dignity and freedom of another by dealing in the wetback business as did Joseph and Mary Rivas.

It is clear, then, that Steinbeck has attempted to present a comprehensive picture of Monterey in the trilogy. His descriptions reveal a multi-ethnic fishing village that erupted into a cannery town and quickly spent itself, leaving but a vestige of its past glory. It is necessary to look to all of the novels of the trilogy in order to get the complete picture. Certainly this was Steinbeck's intention when he chose each succeeding phase of Monterey's life rather than allowing his setting to remain static.

There is another aspect to Steinbeck's choice of setting for the trilogy. When the publication of Tortilla Flat brought Steinbeck his first popular success, Monterey was home for Steinbeck. He had grown up in its familiar surroundings and his descriptions of the pre-1930 Monterey reveal his affection for the small town of his youth. The thirties brought change to Monterey, primarily due to the growth of the fish cannery business. Steinbeck saw these changes and recorded them in Cannery Row. Despite change, nights and early mornings still held a kind of magic, and Steinbeck recorded this, too. By the time of Sweet Thursday, the war had brought even more change to Monterey. In addition, Steinbeck had been living in New York for several years. Steinbeck's recognition of the changes that had come to Monterey is reflected in a statement to Webster Street when Street asked him about returning to California to live. Steinbeck's response to Street was, "I feel about Monterey

like Amy Lowell thought about Oakland. . . . In the first place, the Monterey I knew isn't there any more, the people aren't there any more; they are all different."⁵ Street clarifies Steinbeck's reference to Amy Lowell by reminding us that, in referring to Oakland, Amy Lowell said, "There's no there there."⁶ It is this sense of loss that Steinbeck depicts in Sweet Thursday as he catalogues the changes that have taken place. Thus, his documentation of Monterey's evolution in the trilogy is both historical and personal, revealing more than a haphazard choice of setting for these three novels.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

¹Lisca, Wide World, p. 73.

²John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat (1935; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 1-2. All page numbers refer to this edition.

³John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (1945; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 1. All page numbers refer to this edition.

⁴John Steinbeck, Sweet Thursday (1954; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 1. All page numbers refer to this edition.

⁵Webster Street, "John Steinbeck: A Reminiscence," Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, p. 41.

⁶Street, p. 41.

CHAPTER III

COMIC TONE AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT

In addition to setting, a second element which the Monterey novels have in common is comic tone. As with setting, the tone is not identical in each of the novels but rather suggests an evolutionary process. It shifts from mock epic in Tortilla Flat to satire in Cannery Row to farce in Sweet Thursday. These comic modes reflect the predominant attitude in each of the novels, although all three are present to some degree in all of the works. The seemingly lighthearted approach to his subject is what distinguishes the tone of these three novels from the serious tone of Steinbeck's other novels.¹ The Monterey novels are, however, in the mainstream of Steinbeck fiction in that they embody many qualities and techniques typical of Steinbeck's work, and the humorous tone serves only as a means of uniting them as a trilogy.

In Tortilla Flat the mock epic tone, specifically the use of elevated language and epic or heroic treatment of trivial incidents involving "low-born" characters, grows primarily out of Steinbeck's avowed purpose of basing the story of Danny and his friends on the Arthurian legend. Lisca, in dealing with the mock epic characteristics of the

novel, notes that the tone is first established in the pre-face:²

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. . . ." This history is designed now and ever to keep the sneers from the lips of sour scholars (p. 1).

The humorous intent of this elevated statement of purpose is soon recognized when Steinbeck recounts the first of the paisanos' exploits. World War I had broken out. Danny and Pilon "had two gallons of wine when they heard about the war." Soon Big Joe Portagee joined them.

As the wine went down in the bottles, patriotism arose in the three men. And when the wine was gone they went down the hill arm in arm for comradeship and safety, and they walked into Monterey. In front of an enlistment station they cheered loudly for America and dared Germany to do her worst. They howled menaces at the German Empire until the enlistment sergeant awakened and put on his uniform and came into the street to silence them. He remained to enlist them. . . . And so Danny went to Texas and broke mules for the duration of the war. And Pilon marched about Oregon with the infantry, and Big Joe, as shall be later made clear, went to jail (pp. 2-3).

Lisca also cites the chapter headings as contributing to the mock epic tone:³

How Danny, home from the wars, found himself an heir, and how he swore to protect the helpless (p. 5).

How Danny's Friends sought mystic treasure on Saint Andrew's Eve. How Pilon found it and later how a pair of serge pants changed ownership twice (p. 55).

How Danny was ensnared by a vacuum-cleaner and how Danny's Friends rescued him (p. 71).

Another way in which the tone is sustained, as Lisca points out, is by authorial comment.⁴

Sometime 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 superhuman amorous activity that night, this same historian may write with unshaking hand: "When any living organism is attacked, its 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!" (p. 142).

Finally, and most important, in sustaining the mock epic tone, Lisca notes, is the language used by the paisanos themselves.⁵ Although part of the mock epic effect is the result of a translation of the Spanish idiom into English, for the most part it is due to the "conscious elevation of tone by the speakers."⁶ When Danny, who has just "escaped" from jail and has secured food at the back door of a restaurant, sees Pilon, his first inclination is to avoid his friend, since he has scarcely enough food to share. However, when Danny looks closer he sees that Pilon is clutching a bottle. Danny's attitude immediately changes to generosity, but he knows a degree of circumspection is required. "Pilon, my little friend! Where goest thou so fast? . . . I looked for thee, dearest of little angelic friends, for see, I have here two great steaks from God's own pig. . . ." It does not take Pilon long to realize Danny's intention, for he asks sadly, "Danny, . . . how knewest thou I had a bottle

of brandy under my coat?" But Danny is not to be outwitted.

"Brandy?" Danny cried. "Thou hast brandy? Perhaps it is for some sick old mother," he said naively. "Perhaps thou keepest it for Our Lord Jesus when He comes again. Who am I, thy friend, to judge the destination of this brandy?" (pp. 7-8).

These examples show that the humorous tone of Tortilla Flat is achieved primarily by employing the mock epic technique, but there are also examples of satire and farce which contribute to the comic tone of the novel. The kind of farce that later characterizes Sweet Thursday may be found in such incidents as the one wherein Sweets Ramirez finds her status elevated by the ownership of a vacuum cleaner, despite the lack of electricity in Tortilla Flat (pp. 71-81). Another example of this kind of humor is the episode in which Danny and his friends come to the aid of a damsel in distress. In the year of the bean failure they take upon themselves the task of providing food for Teresina Cortez and her nine fatherless children. Their final glorious feat is the procuring of four hundred pounds of beans which the grateful Teresina termed a "miracle" as "she wondered idly which one of Danny's friends was responsible" for her tenth pregnancy (pp. 104-111).

Subjects for satire range from middle-class Americans to American customs and institutions to the paisanos themselves. On American business Steinbeck comments: "The paisanos are clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can

be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them very vigorously"(p. 2). However, the paisanos, too, use the American business technique as when Pilon, who has rented Danny's house for fifteen dollars a month, sub-leases a portion of the house to Pablo for the same amount, and the two, in turn, offer the same bargain to Jesus Maria Corcoran. Although no rent was ever actually paid, the paisanos were well-versed in the ways of business. Also, the paisanos as well as the rest of society were victims of such customs and institutions as the funeral.

Funerals . . . are social functions. Imagine going to a funeral without first polishing the automobile. Imagine standing at a graveside not dressed in your best dark suit and your best black shoes, polished delightfully. Imagine sending flowers to a funeral with no attached card to prove you had done the correct thing. In no social institution is the codified ritual of behavior more rigid than in funerals. Imagine the indignation if the minister altered his sermon or experimented with facial expression. Consider the shock if, at the funeral parlors, any chairs were used but those little folding yellow torture chairs with the hard seats. No, dying, a man may be loved, hated, mourned, missed; but once dead he becomes the chief ornament of a complicated and formal social celebration (pp. 145-146).

Because of this rigid code, Danny's friends cannot attend his funeral. They have no fine clothes nor shiny automobile, and rather than risk disgracing the memory of their friend, they view the ceremony from a vantage point in the weeds.

Despite instances of farce and satire, however, Tortilla Flat depends primarily on the mock epic tone for its humorous effect. On the other hand, Cannery Row is dependent on satire and farce. Few, if any, of the mock epic

characteristics are present. A few passages of authorial comment suggest the elevated style of the mock epic, such as the opening of Chapter II: "The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern . . ." (p. 8). And some of the exploits of Mack and the boys in their dedication to doing "something nice for Doc" might be seen as the mock epic treatment of the knight-errant theme, for certainly they are errant in every sense of the word. For the most part, however, farce and, especially, satire carry the burden of comic effect.

Examples of farce abound in Cannery Row in the cataloging of antics of Mack and the boys. There is the episode in which they rent the Palace Flophouse from Lee Chong, an incident similar to the rental agreements in Tortilla Flat. The landlord did not really expect to receive any rent, and the tenants never paid any; but the bargain was struck, and that kept the relationship in balance. Other examples of farce are the infamous frog hunt to earn money for a party for Doc and the more infamous party which ended in chaos before Doc even arrived, leaving Doc's laboratory in a shambles.

For the most part, however, the farcical episodes of Cannery Row are subordinate to the satirical criticism of the traditional American way of life or what French calls

"respectability."⁷ In all three of the Monterey novels the protagonists are voluntary dropouts from society who value freedom above all else. Their ability to co-exist peacefully with the respectable members of society without succumbing to the demands of that society is central in each of the novels, although in Sweet Thursday there is evidence of compromise. Lisca notes Steinbeck's change of attitude toward those characters who have rejected society in the ten years between Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row: ". . . Steinbeck's detached, amused, tongue-in-cheek acceptance of such a group changes to an active championing of their way of Life . . ."⁸ This shift of attitude partially accounts for the change of tone from the mock epic to the satiric.

Steinbeck sees the inhabitants of Cannery Row "through another peephole." To him they are not "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches," but "saints and angels and martyrs and holy men" (p. 1).

Mack and the boys are the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces. In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums (p. 9).

Steinbeck's support of the carefree life of Mack and the boys as they thumb their noses at prescribed ethics is

apparent. Preoccupation with property rights must be one of the great ills of society, judging from the abandon with which Mack and the boys violate that right. If the cause is worthy, anything from commandeering a carburetor to trespassing on private property in search of frogs is acceptable, and private ownership merely leads to unnecessary anxiety.

However, Steinbeck's criticism is not always presented subtly in the guise of titillating antics. More obvious is his satirical treatment of the desire to possess the accoutrements of respectable society. A case in point is the episode of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Malloy, who moved into an abandoned boiler in the vacant lot. In time a housing shortage resulted in Mr. Malloy's renting some of the larger pipes in the vacant lot as sleeping quarters. "Mrs. Malloy had been contented until her husband became a landlord and then she began to change. First it was a rug, then a washtub, then a lamp with a colored silk shade" (p. 29). Finally she decided she must have some lace curtains because, as she said, "I like things nice." She accused her husband of "begrutching" her the \$1.98 for the curtains. "'I don't begrutch you,' said Mr. Malloy, 'But darling--for Christ's sake what are we going to do with curtains? We got no windows'" (p. 29). It took only a few tears and the accusation "Men just don't understand how a woman feels" (p. 30) to persuade the frustrated Malloy. The next morning he asked Mack, "You know any kind of glue you can stick cloth to iron?"

Not until Sweet Thursday is it learned that Mrs. Malloy never got her curtains. Instead, her nagging drove her husband to violence which sent him to jail and her to a job "slinging hash." It is Suzy of Sweet Thursday who finally hangs curtains in the boiler.

The Malloy episode suggests another target for satire-- marriage, which Steinbeck believes is a restrictive condition that has nurtured the development of the whorehouse. Steinbeck's acceptance of and admiration for the dishonored profession is apparent in much of his fiction. In East of Eden he remarks that "the church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously,"⁹ thus putting those two institutions on equal footing. In Cannery Row respite from the monotony of marriage can be found in "the stern and stately whore house of Dora Flood; a decent, clean, honest, old-fashioned sporting house where a man can take a glass of beer among friends" (p. 9). But Dora "is hated by the twisted and lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters whose husbands respect the home but don't like it very much" (p. 10).

A final example of Steinbeck's satirical treatment of a revered institution in Cannery Row concerns death and funerals, a subject he also treated satirically in Tortilla Flat. Actually, the episode in question is two-pronged. It satirizes the attitude toward death and funerals, and it satirizes the public attitude toward literary figures. The incident deals with a singular disgrace perpetrated against

one Josh Billings, a noted humorist, by a foreigner who was no doubt unaware of the customs of Monterey. It was the responsibility of a certain French doctor to handle the "sickness, birth, and death in the town." He also worked with animals and "dabbled in the new practice of embalming bodies before they were buried," a practice "some of the old-timers" thought "sentimental," others thought "wasteful," and still others thought "sacrilegious." "But the better and richer families were coming to it and it looked to become a fad" (p. 43). In the case of Josh Billings, it seems the good doctor was in charge at the time of Mr. Billings' death and embalmed him; afterwards, there being no immediate kin, the doctor disposed of the remains in his usual manner by dropping them in the nearby gulch. When portions of the innards were dragged from the gulch by a boy and his dog and were recognized as human innards, the story came out. The townspeople were shocked.

Josh Billings was a great man, a great writer. He had honored Monterey by dying there and he had been degraded. . . . The French doctor was made to collect the parts. He was forced to wash them reverently and pick out as much sand as possible. The doctor himself had to stand the expense of the leaden box which went into the coffin of Josh Billings. For Monterey was not a town to let dishonor come to a literary man (pp. 44-45).

While the humor of Tortilla Flat stems from its mock epic tone and that of Cannery Row from its satire, Sweet Thursday's humor derives primarily from farcical incidents, and those not always in the best of taste. A musical comedy air pervades the novel, which is not surprising since it was Steinbeck's reason for writing the novel in the first place.

Lisca notes that Steinbeck had in mind writing a comedy while he was still at work on East of Eden.¹⁰ In September, 1952, about the time of the publication of East of Eden, Steinbeck said in an interview, "I'm so fascinated by everything about the theatre I don't really care if the show's a flop,"¹¹ referring to his up-coming novel already destined to serve as the libretto for Rodgers and Hammerstein's Pipe Dream. Even the title Sweet Thursday was chosen by Steinbeck because of a song by that name which Rodgers and Hammerstein were writing before the novel was even published.¹² Sweet Thursday was published in June, 1954. Pipe Dream opened December 19, 1955. Lisca says the musical "was an instant popular success,"¹³ but French, who calls the novel a "sellout" and "a tired book," claims that Pipe Dream "was classified by Variety as a 'flop.'"¹⁴

Although Sweet Thursday certainly does not exhibit the quality of writing of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, mainly because of its sentimentality, characteristic of romantic comedy, and the many incidents where its humor is forced beyond farce to slapstick, it nonetheless belongs with the two earlier novels as part of the trilogy and is not the inferior work that French views it. Like the two earlier works, Sweet Thursday combines farce, satire, and mock epic qualities to gain comic effect, but farce predominates. In fact, little of the mock epic is apparent; only occasional attempts at an elevated language suggest a deliberate mock epic

approach, such as in chapter titles--"Whom the Gods Love They Drive Nuts," "There's a Hole in Reality through Which We Can Look if We Wish," "Il n'y a pas de Mouches sur La Grandmère," "Lama Sabachthani"-- or Mack's self-conscious philosophical flights--"Doc lets concealment like a worm in the bud feed on his damask cheek" (p. 67); "Vice is a monster so frightful of mien, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings" (p. 240). Perhaps the chapter called "The Great Roque War" was intended to suggest mock epic accounts of military battles, but for the most part the aura of musical comedy obscures the mock epic.

On the other hand, satire is very much in evidence in Sweet Thursday. The target, as usual, is the American way of life or, more specifically, middle class morality, although Steinbeck manages a few jibes at the medical profession and the war and military service in general. When Mack notes a relationship between affluence and health, Doc calls Mack's ideas a "new theory of medicine." As is often the case with Steinbeck's satire, he aims his attack in two directions-- at the bored, neurotic woman and at the "understanding" doctor. Says Mack:

"You take a dame and she's married to a guy that's making twenty-five bucks a week. You can't kill her with a meat ax. . . . Guy gets up to a hundred a week and this same dame reads Time magazine and she's got the newest disease before she even finished the page. . . . They got stuff called allergy now. Used to call it hay fever. . . . Guy that figured out allergy should of got a patent. A allergy is, you get sick when there's something you don't want to do" (p. 89).

Not only does Mack understand the neurotic female, he also understands the working of the medical profession.

". . . First I'd hire me a deaf-and-dumb assistant. His job is just to sit and listen and look worried. Then I'd get me a bottle of Epsom salts and I'd put in a pretty little screw-cap thing and I'd call it Moondust. I'd charge about thirty dollars a teaspoonful, and you got to come to my office to get it. Then I'd invent me a machine you strap the dame in. It's all chrome and it lights colored lights every minute or so. It costs the dame twelve dollars a half-hour and it puts her through the motions she'd do over a scrub board. I'd cure them! And I'd make a fortune too. Of course they'd get sick right away again, so I'd have something else, like mixed sleeping pills and wake-up pills that keeps you right where you was when you started" (p. 90).

These observations on medical problems, while satiric in intent, are exaggerated enough not to be too offensive. Steinbeck's comments on the military are more pointed. At the beginning of the novel it is learned that Doc, a biologist, was drafted and "served out his time as a tech sergeant in a V. D. section" while he "resisted promotion" and "whiled away his free hours with an unlimited supply of government alcohol," after which he "was kept on by a grateful government to straighten out certain inventory problems, a job he was fitted for since he had contributed largely to the muck-up" (pp. 1-2). In typical military tradition, such exemplary behavior earned Doc an "honorable" discharge. Whitey No. 1 avoided the draft by going to work in a war plant. He "broke his leg the second day and spent three months in luxury" learning to play harmonica "in his white hospital bed" (pp. 2-3). But Whitey No. 2 had the makings

of a hero; he joined the Marine Corps. However, he resented their not allowing him to keep his prize--"a quart jar of ears pickled in brandy" that he wanted as "a memento of his service to his country" (p. 3). And somehow poor, weak-minded Hazel managed to get into the Army "long enough to qualify for the G. I. Bill, and he enrolled at the University of California for training in astrophysics by making a check mark on an application" (pp. 4-5). Steinbeck's bitterness over the war, which he managed to suppress in Cannery Row by setting it in pre-war times, makes itself known in Sweet Thursday. This type of biting satire seems out of place amid the pervasive buffoonery of the novel.

There are other portions wherein Steinbeck's satire seems excessively sharp, and these portions account for French's calling Sweet Thursday "a cantankerous book."¹⁵ While this charge is too harsh, and really not accurate in light of the high comedy in the bulk of the novel, French's accusation is not unfounded. He cites three areas which indicate "that Steinbeck . . . was becoming increasingly more concerned with his own crotchets than with the state of mankind."¹⁶ First, he sees the two chapters "The Great Roque War" and "The Butterfly Festivals" as "malicious attacks" on Pacific Grove rather than on "middle-class respectability." Second, he sees old Jingleballicks' criticism of bureaucracies--"The only creative thing we have is the individual, but the law doesn't permit me to give money to

an individual . . ."--as "special pleading," believing that Steinbeck was seeking personal recognition. And finally, French sees Steinbeck's characterization of Joe Elegant as a deliberate stab at Truman Capote. In support of this last accusation French calls attention to Capote's picture on Other Voices, Other Rooms and cites Steinbeck's passage in which Joe Elegant was musing over the publication of his book and how he would pose for his photograph on the dust cover.¹⁷

Although French's views cannot be entirely disregarded, they are too narrow. There is considerably more to Steinbeck's treatment of Joe Elegant than the passage just noted, and to suggest that Steinbeck has limited his criticism to one object rather than aiming at the "psychological" and obscure writing school in general is unfair. Likewise, it is clear that Steinbeck is aiming some rather sharp barbs at Pacific Grove, the town that "sprang full blown from the iron heart of a psycho-ideo-legal religion" (p. 47). Nonetheless, "The Great Roque War" and "The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival" are commentaries on middle class values and reveal to what lengths the citizens will go in the one instance to win a game, and in the latter case to continue a profit-making tradition. As for old Jingleballicks, he is certainly the deus ex machina that French believes him to be, but such a view does not necessarily render his observations on bureaucracies invalid. Instead, this character serves to further one of the themes of the novel--isolation

versus conformity. Old Jingleballicks enables Doc, who has found that rejection of society leads to loneliness, to become reconciled, accepting society's absurdities and recognizing his own needs. This may not be as exciting as the "individual against the world" philosophy, but it is certainly more pragmatic and suggests Steinbeck's own change of attitude since Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, when he seemed to feel that isolation was preferable to giving up one's freedom. This attitude will be dealt with more extensively in the discussion of themes in the next chapter.

For the most part the satire in Sweet Thursday is low-keyed. It is in the form of gentle nudging, in contrast to those few incidents just cited which are scattered sparsely through the novel so that their bite is the exception rather than the usual. Marriage, which in Cannery Row was always an intolerable situation, becomes acceptable under certain conditions. Mack says the reason for failure in marriage is that "if he's left alone a guy practically always marries the wrong kind of dame" (p. 69). In other words, a good marriage requires the objective opinion of others. Concerning respectable jobs as opposed to work in a whorehouse, Suzy says, "I worked waitress and I worked Five-and-Dime. Only difference is, you get took to a movie instead of three bucks" (p. 33). And Doc tells the old seer on the beach, "I'm surprised they don't lock you up--a reasonable man. It's one of the symptoms of our time to find danger in men like you who don't worry and rush about. . . . It's

a crime to be happy without equipment" (p. 61). Steinbeck shows his distrust of the new materialism represented by a preoccupation with gimmicks when he compares the Golden Poppy with the "gay and phony little restaurants springing up in Monterey." The loyal diners at the Golden Poppy "distrusted fishnets on the walls and jokes on the menu" (p. 197). It is this type of satire that is more representative of the general tone of Sweet Thursday.

For all its satire, though, the dominant air of Sweet Thursday is farcical. The novel is farce from the recounting of the double-named Joseph and Mary Rivas' circuitous path which brings him to Cannery Row in time to replace Lee Chong, to the final exit of Suzy and Doc riding off into the sunset in their bucking jalopy. Mack and the boys continue the sort of madcap foolery they perpetrated in Cannery Row. They are still trying to "throw a party" for Doc. One of the reasons for the party is to raffle off the Palace Flophouse and rig it so that Doc will win it, thus insuring a lifetime security for Mack and the boys. Mack, of course, must first ascertain that Joseph and Mary Rivas does not suspect that the Flophouse is his own property. The interplay between the two professional con men as each tries to sound out the other without tipping his own hand is a comic gem. Each thinks he has outsmarted the other, and it is not until later in the novel that the real humor of the situation is revealed. Neither had grounds for suspicion because the

Flophouse that Mack was trying to keep Rivas from knowing that he owned belonged to Mack and the boys all along.

Other farcical incidents involve action in the Bear Flag. The whorehouse that Fauna inherited from her sister Dora has become "a kind of finishing school for girls" (p. 4). Fauna provided the Ready Room for the girls to use when there were no customers. It was used for relaxation and for instruction, for it was there that Fauna taught her girls posture, grammar, and table manners. Gambling is forbidden at the Bear Flag. It is all right for a "young lady" to "run a few passes with a customer," but to Fauna "gambling's a vice" (p. 82). She also deplores profanity: "Vulgarity gives a hookshop a bad name" (p. 82).

From the standpoint of tone as well as plot, the high point of the novel is the masquerade party. From its beginning to Suzy's outburst that brings down the curtain, it is a series of hilarious incidents, with at least one tasteless bit of slapstick that indicates to what extremes Steinbeck reaches for his humor. Decorations turned the Palace Flophouse into what Mack called a "veritable fairyland." Johnny Carriaga, who had been "rented" to play cupid, got the raffle off to a riotous start then "ran wild" firing "at random but not at unsuspecting hearts." The party had gotten off to a bad start with the entrance of Hazel in his tasteless Prince Charming costume which Joe Elegant had maliciously fashioned for him. It disintegrated from that point.

Fortunately the novel does not end with the disastrous party which begins as farce, moves to ribaldry, and dissolves in slapstick. Steinbeck manages to recapture some of the jovial comedy of the early part of the novel with Suzy's efforts to reform and Hazel's struggle with greatness; and the musical comedy ending is satisfactory enough, though one might question the necessity of Hazel's breaking Doc's arm in order to bring Doc and Suzy together. All in all, except for a few lapses, Steinbeck manages to sustain the comic tone of Sweet Thursday so that the overall effect is humorous.

Comic tone helps to unify the Monterey Trilogy, and Steinbeck uses a variety of techniques which blend for a total humorous effect. All of the novels contain examples of mock epic, satire, and farce, but Steinbeck uses whatever means he can to obtain the desired effect. Narrative, dialogue, and plot all aim toward the same end--humor. In Tortilla Flat the use of the Arthurian cycle made the mock epic approach a natural one for dealing with the paisanos' exploits. Cannery Row was Steinbeck's response to a group of soldiers who had said, "Write something funny that isn't about the war."¹⁸ Finally, farce seemed a suitable technique for Sweet Thursday, a novel which was to be staged as a musical comedy.

A cursory reading of the three novels leaves the reader amused. Such a reaction was probably Steinbeck's deliberate

intention. Each of the novels was written in what might be termed an "off moment" for Steinbeck, his primary aim being to entertain. More careful reading and reflection reveal that, in spite of their humorous tone, the Monterey novels are not mere flippancies. Beneath their comic tone Steinbeck deals with serious themes, which will be discussed next. The lighthearted approach, however, is an important characteristic of the novels, one which contributes to making them a trilogy.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

¹The tone of The Short Reign of Pippin IV is also comic; however, this work is truly a deviation for Steinbeck. It is a political fantasy using broad satire and has been virtually overlooked by critics. Hayashi lists nothing after a flurry of reviews following its publication in 1957 except brief treatments in five surveys. There is even the question of whether it can be considered a novel. Gray lists it as nonfiction.

²Lisca, Wide World, p. 79.

³Lisca, Wide World, p. 80.

⁴Lisca, Wide World, p. 80.

⁵Lisca, Wide World, pp. 80-81.

⁶Lisca, Wide World, p. 81.

⁷French, John Steinbeck, pp. 120-136.

⁸Lisca, Wide World, p. 200.

⁹John Steinbeck, East of Eden (1952; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 249.

¹⁰Lisca, Wide World, p. 276.

¹¹Lewis Nichols, "A Talk With John Steinbeck," The New York Times Book Review, 28 Sept. 1952, p. 30, cited by Lisca, Wide World, p. 276.

¹²Lisca, Wide World, p. 277.

¹³Lisca, Wide World, p. 277.

¹⁴French, p. 160.

¹⁵French, p. 158.

¹⁶French, p. 158.

¹⁷French, pp. 158-160.

¹⁸John Steinbeck, "My Short Novels," cited in Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 39.

CHAPTER IV

THEMES IN THE MONTEREY TRILOGY

Since theme concerns an author's ideas and tone is his attitude toward his materials, it is impossible to discuss one without discussing the other, and separation of the two for purposes of discussion must be somewhat arbitrary because of their interrelatedness. It is also impossible to discuss themes in one novel or group of novels without discussing, to some extent, basic themes characteristic of the author's work in general. This is especially true of the Monterey Trilogy.

As with any literary work, Steinbeck's works involve multi-level understanding. The discussion of comic tone as a unifying element, in the preceding chapter, dealt to some extent with the themes of the trilogy, especially the one major theme which is recurrent in most of Steinbeck's work--the attack on middle class values. Although Steinbeck usually expresses such criticism in the serious tone of In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, or The Winter of Our Discontent, in Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday he presents it satirically. In addition to the attack on middle class values, naturalistic themes and anti-intellectualism are prevalent in Steinbeck's fiction. These themes are also evident in the trilogy and contribute in some measure to the

overall tone, though not as obviously as does the social satire. All of these themes have the same root, Steinbeck's naturalistic philosophy.

This naturalistic philosophy can be traced to two major influences: the literary movement called naturalism which took hold in the 1890's and is loosely defined as a literary philosophy of biological and environmental determinism, and the influence of Edward F. Ricketts, Steinbeck's close friend and pattern for the character of Doc in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Horace Platt Taylor, Jr. lists Ricketts and Steinbeck's love of nature in his early childhood as the two major influences on Steinbeck's naturalistic philosophy and makes no reference to the literary tradition with which Steinbeck was most familiar.¹ No doubt Steinbeck's childhood helped to shape his ideas. Nonetheless, a consideration of the similarities between those characteristics in the novels of the 1890's which are considered naturalistic and those characteristics found in Steinbeck's work makes it apparent that Steinbeck was influenced by literary naturalism.

The naturalistic themes in Steinbeck's fiction are man as animal, the group as organism, and interdependence of organisms within an environment. The first two are major themes in most of Steinbeck's works; the third, though discernible throughout his works, is especially apparent in the trilogy. Typically naturalistic, Steinbeck's characters are drawn from the lower classes and are often grotesque--

migrants, misfits, mental deficient. The Joads in The Grapes of Wrath, Lennie in Of Mice and Men, Cathy in East of Eden are typical naturalistic characters, as are the paisanos of Tortilla Flat and the inhabitants of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Since the concept of man is that he is an animal responding to natural laws, these characters are presented in animalistic terms. Animal imagery is frequent. The gopher chapter in Cannery Row mirrors the well-known turtle chapter of The Grapes of Wrath. Both the gopher and the turtle are symbols of man and his condition. Characters are often likened to animals. In The Grapes of Wrath, Muley Graves is "mean like a wolf"² and Rose-of-Sharon's husband Connie is "jack-rabbit quick an' fox sneaky" (p. 344). The paisanos of Tortilla Flat drink "like effete bees" (p. 8), and when Danny butted one of the girls at their party, she left "croaking like a frog" (p. 15). In Cannery Row, Lee Chong's mind picked "its way as delicately as a cat through cactus" (p. 7), and Henri the painter nosed through the vacant lot "like an Airedale" (p. 2). And in Sweet Thursday Doc finds it hard to concentrate because "the mind darts like a chicken" (p. 37). Suzy thinks Joseph and Mary Rivas has "eyes like a snake" (p. 43), and Old Jingleballicks is described as having eyes "bright as a bird's" (p. 144).

Another way that Steinbeck conveys the idea of man's animal nature is through emphasis on basic drives rather than on will in determining man's actions. Survival, either

through adaptation or violence is a major theme. The Joads of The Grapes of Wrath learn to adapt to a new way of life in order to survive. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat and Mack and the boys of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday adapt to their environment through means of a type of camouflage, much as the Joads learn to adapt to a new way of life. Since neither the paisanos nor the Cannery Row boys own anything or strive to own anything, they pose no threat to those who do strive for material possessions; and since they quietly blend into the background--the paisanos on the hill above Monterey and Mack and the boys in the Row--and avoid open confrontation, they escape the wrath of an outraged society. Conflicts are settled physically. The migrants of In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath resolve differences in physical combat. The characters in the trilogy do the same. In Tortilla Flat when Joe Portagee breaks the code of friendship and steals some of the Pirate's money, Danny and the others beat him unmercifully. And in Cannery Row Mack and the boys feel no compunction in thrashing the sailors who attempt to crash their party and cast aspersions on Dora's girls; even Doc joins in. Doc is the aggressor in Sweet Thursday when he attacks Rivas who has tried to make advances toward Suzy. Sex also plays a major role as a natural drive. Frederick Bracher observes that "Steinbeck persistently writes of sex relations in physical terms . . . there is almost no picture

of romantic love . . ."³ Even in Sweet Thursday, probably Steinbeck's most sentimental novel, Doc's love for Suzy is based on unreasonable physical need.

In addition to presenting man as animal by choosing characters from the lower classes, by using animal imagery, and by emphasizing basic drives, Steinbeck's naturalistic philosophy is central to his theory of group organism, sometimes called group-man. The theory of group organism is scientifically investigated in the non-fiction Sea of Cortez (1941) which Steinbeck wrote in collaboration with Edward Ricketts after their trip to the Gulf of California to collect marine animals. Group organism is the phenomenon of the group assuming a life force of its own, apart from that of the individual. Its human application is spelled out by Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, the first novel in which Steinbeck patterned a character after Ricketts. In a conversation with the communist organizer Mac, Doc Burton says:

"I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you."⁴

Although Rickett's influence is often noted in discussions of Steinbeck's scientific leanings, this idea of the group organism is evident in Steinbeck's work before he met Ricketts. Fontenrose notes a similarity to the group organism in the group called the Brotherhood of Buccaneers in Steinbeck's first published novel Cup of Gold (1929).⁵

However, several years' association with Ricketts no doubt helped Steinbeck to formulate this concept; for it is clear, as Fontenrose observes, that "in Tortilla Flat Steinbeck's biological point of view becomes explicit, and for the first time he makes deliberate, if humorous, use of the conception of the group as organism."⁶ Fontenrose also recognizes the fact that Steinbeck shows how groups as well as individuals may join and act as organisms. Thus Danny's house (Danny and his friends) is an organism which is part of the larger organism Tortilla Flat which is part of the still larger organism of Monterey.⁷ Lester Jay Marks notes a similar system in Cannery Row,⁸ though he fails to see the same system at work in Sweet Thursday. In fact, the group organism theme is easily detected in both novels. Mack and the boys at the Palace Flophouse comprise an organism which is part of Cannery Row which, like Tortilla Flat, is part of Monterey. Sweet Thursday even implies the larger organism of the whole country or society, with the change in attitude toward society which leads to a type of reconciliation and acceptance of traditional mores.

The third naturalistic theme in Steinbeck's fiction, one which in reality is a facet of the group organism theme, is the ecological theme of interdependence of organisms within an environment. In today's vernacular it would be called "the balance in nature." This interdependence is especially apparent in the Monterey novels, particularly in Cannery Row.

Fontenrose recognizes the ecological nature of Tortilla Flat and notes the paisanos' "symbiotic" or "commensal" relationship to Monterey.⁹ He sees a similar ecological theme in Cannery Row and cites the tide pool as "central image,"¹⁰ an observation which Alexander makes in his discussion of pastoral elements in Cannery Row.¹¹ Lisca refers to this ecological theme as one of "mutual benevolence."¹²

Surprisingly, no critics recognize this same theme in Sweet Thursday; yet it is one of the major themes. The necessity for maintaining a proper ecological balance in order to insure survival of the species is a topic of conversation between Doc and Old Jay (Jingleballicks). Old Jay foresees eventual human extinction because of man's interventions:

"Predators he [man] has removed from the earth; heat and cold he has turned aside; communicable disease he has practically eliminated. . . . The best wars can't even balance the birth rate. . . . The population grows and productivity of the earth decreases. . . . It is a cosmic joke. Preoccupation with survival has set the stage for extinction" (p. 147).

But Doc is more optimistic, seeing in nature evidence of salvation. He admits that "there have been species which became extinct through their own miscalculations, but they were species with a small range of variability." He cites the behavior of lemmings when the existing food supply will not support the population: "Whole masses of them swim out to sea and drown, until a balance of food and population is reached." Doc suggests that an increase in "neurotic

disturbances" and the "tendency toward homosexuality" might "be the human solution" (p. 148). In other words, man has a sufficient range of variability in his nature to adjust or sacrifice in order to preserve the species. Additionally, each organism within a species has his peculiar function in order to maintain the life of the larger organism or species.

In Tortilla Flat it is not difficult to see this sort of ecology at work. Each of the members of Danny's House contributes to the needs of the group, whether it be securing food or wine or offering support in other ways. When it comes time for the Pirate to make good his vow to St. Francis, all of his friends lend him clothes for his appearance in church. As a group they contribute to the larger community by taking in the young corporal with his dying baby and by aiding Teresina in the year of the bean failure.

This type of eco-system is also evident in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Each of the boys in the Palace Flophouse makes his own unique contribution to the group, but beyond the Palace Flophouse are other units of Cannery Row which make up the larger system. The country store run by Lee Chong, and later by Rivas, supplies whatever commodities are needed by the inhabitants of Cannery Row, save one, which is available at the Bear Flag. Doc, besides being somewhat of a "god" in Cannery Row, serves a practical function as well. He can always be counted on to buy specimens for his

laboratory work. Selling frogs and cats to Doc enables Mack and the boys to raise a few dollars from time to time without resorting to the more drastic measure of working at the canneries. They work at the canneries only in emergencies because their ethics require them to stay on the job for at least a month in order not to ruin their "reputation for sticking" (Cannery Row, p. 27).

Closely related to the naturalistic theme and associated with most naturalistic novels are the themes of anti-intellectualism and the attack on society's values. They are also among the most consistent themes in Steinbeck's works. Anti-intellectualism is an extension of the naturalistic view of man as animal. Since man is an organism responding to impulse rather than thought, the common man, not the intellectual, is offered as the genuine man; it is with him that the reader sympathizes. Often Steinbeck includes a character who may be classified as a type of intellectual-- Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, preacher Jim Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, Doc in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, the servant Lee in East of Eden. But, as Marks points out, the intellectual "is an outsider who speculates on the group from the biologist's non-teleological point of view."¹³ However, when he is given adequate character development, as in the case of Jim Casy or Doc, his natural rather than his intellectual traits are emphasized. Jim Casy may think in terms of the great over-soul, but his appetites are physical;

and Doc may have his laboratory filled with scientific materials, but he spends his time in the sensual pleasures of drinking and sex.

One of the consequences of the elevation of the common man, the downtrodden, the outcast, is the emphasis on social criticism. Steinbeck persistently stresses the duality of the social system. The Establishment is a monster to be beaten. The people in power continue to gather more power, and as they do so, they become less human. This situation is most graphically described in the chapters on banks, tractors, and farm associations in The Grapes of Wrath, but it is evident throughout Steinbeck's work.

How does one deal with this monster? In Tortilla Flat Steinbeck facetiously suggests a tacit acceptance of it and a cunning avoidance of it. The paisanos avoid confrontation with the monster by making sure they have "nothing that can be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged" (p. 2) and by venturing into its domain only in extreme situations. In In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath, it is obvious that Steinbeck felt nothing short of an organized army and open war would free the people from the monster's oppression. However, a world war intervened, and in Cannery Row Steinbeck offers a solution similar to the one in Tortilla Flat--isolation. By this time the face of the monster has changed; no longer is big business the villain, but middle class morality and materialism. "What can it profit a man to gain the whole

world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals?" asks Steinbeck (Cannery Row, p. 9). His answer in Cannery Row is a rejection of such a society. Ridicule has replaced fear and frustration. The Establishment is no longer a machine in which even the members are victims. Instead, it is a society of willing converts whose hunger for success and insistence on compliance with its own value system renders it as inhuman as its forebear. The Establishment is still monstrous, perhaps, but not exactly terrifying.

In Sweet Thursday there is the suggestion that some aspects of society might be acceptable, at least for some people. Doc, for example, needs a wife; he also accepts a university grant to further his research. And Suzy is to be admired for her ambition to rise above her station as professional whore. Nonetheless, a rejection of materialism and criticism of middle class values is still in evidence, as noted in the discussion of satire in the preceding chapter.

So far this discussion has focussed on themes related directly or indirectly to the basic theory of biological naturalism or, in the case of social criticism, literary naturalism. These are dominant themes in most of Steinbeck's work and are significant in the Monterey Trilogy as well. However, there is another thematic thread that runs through Steinbeck's fiction. Charles C. Walcutt sees it as a branch of the "divided stream" of naturalism which results in a

tension found in naturalistic novels, and which is related to social criticism. It is Walcutt's belief that this tension arises out of the naturalists' attempt to reconcile the physical with the spiritual.¹⁴ The aspect of Steinbeck's writing which Walcutt sees as evidence of confusion in basic philosophy¹⁵ has also disturbed other critics; for critics insist on a clear cut statement of philosophy, a demand few authors try to meet. Thus Steinbeck's work has been judged inconsistent and overly-sentimental. Prior to Walcutt's treatment of the problem, Woodburn O. Ross attempted to reconcile the duality in Steinbeck's works by calling Steinbeck "naturalism's priest" and suggesting that he has attempted to infuse scientific naturalism with a sense of reverence which was lost in literary works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁶ More recently, Marks has suggested a compatibility in Steinbeck's "non-teleological thinking and a reverence for life."¹⁷

Unfortunately, none of the suggested theories fully accounts for this conflict in basic philosophies in Steinbeck's work. While his fiction is often religious in nature, as Ross and Marks suggest, at other times it resembles humanism and even dissolves into saccharine sentiment on occasion. About the only consistency apparent in these "non-naturalistic" themes is that they differ from the more consistent themes in Steinbeck fiction because they are not naturalistic.

In the case of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday, these non-naturalistic themes are the ones that unite the novels. In one way they can be viewed as three themes; however, like most of Steinbeck's themes, they overlap. The first theme which runs through the trilogy is that of the need for freedom, an insistence on individual rights. This theme leads quite naturally into the second theme, escape or rejection of society's norms, which leads into the third and most dominant theme, the consequence of the first two, loneliness.

The desire of the individual to be free of encumbrances and escape, which is the accompanying action, pervades the trilogy and contributes to the dominant comic tone. The rationalizations and the extreme efforts of the paisanos to avoid the traps and trappings of the commercialized American system make delightful reading, as do the humorous antics and attitudes of Mack and the boys in their rejection of materialism and respectability.

The attitude of the paisanos toward possessions is revealed early in the novel. Danny returns from the war to find he has inherited two houses from his grandfather. He tells his friend Pilon about his inheritance and the two inspect the property with the lawyer. Immediately the responsibility of ownership begins to weigh on Danny. "Pilon noticed that the worry of property was settling on Danny's face. No more in life would that face be free of care. No

more would Danny break windows now that he had windows of his own to break." The realization of his plight overcomes Danny. "Pilon, . . . I wished you owned it and I could come to live with you" (p. 11). However, it is too late. The effects of status are at work. Already Danny has begun to make plans for improving his property. Pilon is drawn into the vortex. "'I am getting in debt to him,' he thought bitterly. 'My freedom will be cut off'" (p. 12). But Pilon is helpless because friendship prevents his rejecting the gifts that encroach on his personal freedom. His solution, as is often the case, is to drag others down with him until an act of providence, the burning of the rent house, relieves them of their debt. It is even a boon to Danny who, as a result of the fire, has one less piece of property to burden him.

Whenever friendship makes no demands, which is almost always, the paisanos exercise their freedom by refusing to be caught up in the need for things. Any material possession, their own or another's, is valuable only if it can be traded for self-gratification. If it cannot be eaten, drunk, or traded for food, drink, or romantic favors, it is worthless. The only need that drives the paisanos to the extremity of honest labor is the need to give a party for Danny.

This same attitude toward work and property is held by Mack and the boys in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Work is a last resort and a temporary undertaking in order

to "throw a party for Doc." Otherwise, Mack and the boys "had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment" which they approached "casually, quietly, and absorbed . . . gently" (Cannery Row, p. 6). Hazel says "Mack could of been president of the U. S. if he wanted," to which Jones responds "What could he do with it if he had it? . . . There wouldn't be no fun in that" (p. 52). Doc shares their attitude, except for his scientific interests; and even these are secondary to momentary pleasures unless it is one of the occasional times when specimens must be collected because the tide is right. But these times are natural claims on Doc and have nothing to do with the dictates of society.

Despite the amusing anecdotes illustrating the various ways in which the paisanos and the Cannery Row boys avoid assumption of responsibility and retain their individual freedom, the low voice of loneliness is discernible in the trilogy. It begins as little more than a murmur in Tortilla Flat, becomes more pronounced in Cannery Row and rises to full crescendo in Sweet Thursday. It is seen primarily in the characters of Danny and Doc, but it is present even among Danny's friends and the Cannery Row bums. French sees that Tortilla Flat is "partially a warning that the simple, close-to-nature life that some men think they long for is not the answer to society's problems either."¹⁸ Danny believes that the weight of property and responsibility for others

results in his loss of freedom and causes his loneliness; and to some extent he is right. His inheritance has put him above the others; it has isolated him from the society of paisanos. But he knew loneliness before he was concerned with property. In the beginning of the novel Danny and Pilon are aware of their loneliness as they huddle near their fire in the woods which is their home (p. 8). It is not difficult to read between the lines and suspect that loneliness is a contributing factor to much of the drinking that the paisanos do, for in drinking they are able to forget the aimlessness of their lives and the discomforts of the cold. The episodes which seem to give them the most satisfaction are those in which the paisanos find purpose--giving aid to Teresina or the young corporal, or helping the Pirate make good his vow, or even helping Danny overcome his depression.

Mack and the boys avoid the ulcers of the rat race, perhaps, but they, too, pay the price of escape in loneliness. There is comradeship among them, to be sure, but there is still the need to count for something, to be a part of the world around them. This need is the basis of their drive to do something for Doc. And when their efforts end in disaster, they are cut off from the community, and they are miserable.

The theme of loneliness is clearest, though, when it affects the major protagonists of the novels, Danny and Doc.

It is through these characters that Steinbeck presents the basic theme of loneliness, a state that is the result of being cut off from society and purpose in life. From the outset, Danny and Doc are set apart from the others. Danny is above the other paisanos before he becomes an heir. The first episode in the novel tells of their induction into the army. Pilon and Joe Portagee are put in the infantry, but Danny is sent to "break mules," a job requiring more skill. Danny is the leader of the group of paisanos by their tacit agreement even before the end when he is "translated." Perhaps Danny himself does not fully understand his need, but he suffers the anguish of loneliness, nonetheless.

Doc, like Danny, experiences loneliness, but not until Sweet Thursday does he realize its roots. Mack sees that "in spite of his friendliness and his friends Doc was a lonely and a set-apart man. . . . Even in the dear close contact with a girl Mack felt that Doc would be lonely" (Cannery Row, p. 62). In Sweet Thursday the seer notes that Doc "wore loneliness like a shroud" (p. 224). The gopher in Cannery Row understood Doc's problem. One can stay in seclusion, enjoying peace and security, only so long. Eventually the loneliness drives him out into the threatening world (Cannery Row, pp. 119-121). Cannery Row ends with Doc reading the poem "Black Marigolds" in the loneliness of his laboratory. The suggestion is that Doc is reconciled to his loneliness because he has his memories; he has

"savored the hot taste of life." French sees this ending as Steinbeck's statement that man is superior to the lower animals who have not memories and art to sustain them and must run back to "civilization" for escape from loneliness.¹⁹

If this was Steinbeck's belief at the time of Cannery Row, he had changed by the time he wrote Sweet Thursday. Like the gopher in Cannery Row, Doc finds in Sweet Thursday that the carefree life of Cannery Row is no longer enough. "Before the war Doc had lived a benign and pleasant life. . . . He was beloved and preyed on by his friends, and this contented him" (p. 17). His need for female companionship had been supplied adequately without any formal commitment on his part. "Now discontent nibbled at him . . ." (p. 18). Doc realizes that "man owes something to man" (p. 18). It is at this time that Doc's three voices begin speaking. "'Write!' said his top voice, and 'Search!' sang his middle voice, and his lowest voice sighed, 'Lonesome! Lonesome!'" (p. 50). In the past, only the top voice had been audible, but more and more the low voice demands Doc's attention. His needs are basic and universal. His life must have focus. There must be purpose and one person with whom he can share his life. Mack recognizes Doc's problem first and understands at least part of the solution. "Doc needs a wife" (p. 69). The bulk of the novel deals with the efforts of Cannery Row to supply Doc's need. And while the musical comedy plot threatens to reduce the entire novel to foolishness

and sentimentality, the serious point that Steinbeck is trying to make does come through. Doc and Suzy need each other for physical reasons, but beyond that Doc needs Suzy to help him write his paper and Suzy needs both Doc's support in her new role of respectability and his dependence on her in the writing of his paper.

The themes of the trilogy work two ways. There are those naturalistic themes typical of Steinbeck's fiction which are used in the trilogy in a humorous fashion, and there are the non-naturalistic themes which lend a depth to the novels and rescue them from the category of flippancy. The thematic design of the trilogy is evolutionary, just as the use of setting and tone are evolutionary. Each novel offers a new dimension to the basic themes so that, viewed together, they reveal Steinbeck's growing understanding of the dual nature of man. Lisca sees two major themes at work in most of Steinbeck's novels--escape and commitment. The themes of escape are particularly apparent in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. In the interim Steinbeck explores the theme of commitment in his migrant novels of the thirties. Beginning with Sweet Thursday, Steinbeck attempts to show a merging of the two themes.²⁰ Neither extreme is the appropriate attitude for the healthy organism. The individual may not be entirely free, but neither must he forfeit his individualism to the demands of the larger organism. In the final analysis both biological and spiritual life require

an ecological balance. It is unfortunate that this philosophical understanding of the mature Steinbeck is cloaked in the musical comedy form of Sweet Thursday, for in this disguise it often goes unrecognized. Nonetheless, this maturation is central to the themes of the trilogy.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹"The Biological Naturalism of John Steinbeck," Dissertation Abstracts, 22 (1962), 3674A (Louisiana State Univ., 1961).

²John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (1939; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 61. All other page numbers refer to this edition.

³"Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," Pacific Spectator, 2 (1948), 23.

⁴John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle (1936; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 104.

⁵Fontenrose, pp. 12-13.

⁶Fontenrose, p. 33.

⁷Fontenrose, p. 34.

⁸Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 95.

⁹Fontenrose, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰Fontenrose, pp. 106-107.

¹¹Alexander, p. 287.

¹²Lisca, Wide World, p. 202.

¹³Marks, p. 19.

¹⁴Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 10-29.

¹⁵Walcutt, p. 258.

¹⁶"John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," College English 10(May, 1949), rpt. in Steinbeck and His Critics, pp. 206-215.

¹⁷Marks, pp. 19-26.

¹⁸French, p. 57.

¹⁹French, p. 135.

²⁰Peter Lisca, "Escape and Commitment: Two Poles of the Steinbeck Hero," Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, pp. 78-88.

CHAPTER V

STRUCTURE AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT IN THE MONTEREY NOVELS

The most consistent or non-evolutionary element common to Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday is structure. Yet, even here, the novels are not identical. The structural devices remain constant and tie the novels together while the handling of each device varies and reflects the demands of the novels as they differ from one another. It is easy to see, though, that episodic form, prefaces, chapter titles, and the use of parties as a motif are either unique in the trilogy or handled in a fashion peculiar to the trilogy; thus structure becomes another way of uniting the three novels.

That the Monterey novels are episodic hardly needs proving. It is the one point on which all critics agree. It is also a technique not unique in the trilogy. Most of Steinbeck's novels tend to be episodic in form. Even in his most integrated novels, such as In Dubious Battle or The Grapes of Wrath, chapters are complete in themselves and can often be read as vignettes or short stories separate from the novel, even though each is a vital part of the novel. The Pastures of Heaven is unique in Steinbeck fiction in that it may be viewed either as a novel or as a collection

of short stories. When it was first published, the consensus was that it was a collection of short stories; recently, there seems more support for viewing it as a novel. Lisca feels that technically the book is a collection of short stories, but notes their interrelatedness;¹ and Fontenrose compares it to Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio.²

The episodic nature of the Monterey novels lies somewhere between the approach of The Pastures of Heaven and The Grapes of Wrath. For the most part, a thread of plot runs through the various episodes so that they are more closely connected than the self-contained stories of the former. On the other hand, some of the episodes, or chapters, might be omitted without detriment to the plot and probably without detriment to the purpose or overall effect of the novel, although they certainly lend a dimension to the understanding and enjoyment of the novels which such omission would limit. Unlike the intercalary chapters of The Grapes of Wrath, those of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are not vital to the structure of the novels.

Several chapters in Tortilla Flat have no direct bearing on either the main plot--how "Danny's House" came into being, flourished, and died--or the sub-plot--how the paisanos helped the Pirate keep his vow to buy a gold candlestick for San Francisco de Assisi. Chapters such as "How Danny was ensnared by a vacuum cleaner . . .," "How the Friends solaced a Corporal . . .," "How . . . love came to

Big Joe Portagee," and "How Danny's Friends threw themselves to the aid of a distressed lady" do nothing toward furthering either of the plots in the novel. One of the reasons for a lack of relatedness among some of the episodes stems from Steinbeck's main purpose when he began writing Tortilla Flat. It was his first intention, as a letter to his agents indicates, to write a group of short stories from his experiences while working with some Mexicans and Yuakis at a sugar mill.³ Steinbeck's letter accounts specifically for two stories in the novel, the episode of the Mexican Corporal and the story Jesus Maria relates to the group about the unfortunate romances of Old Man Ravanno and his son Petey. His original intention obviously grew to include stories about the paisanos of Monterey, for Street points out that the paisanos were real people that Steinbeck saw on the streets of Monterey and about whose activities he learned from Police Chief Monty Hellam. Other sources for the Tortilla Flat stories, according to Street, were a paisano named Steve Field (descendant of the first Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court) and a school teacher named Susan Gregory to whom the novel is dedicated.⁴

The task for Steinbeck became one of ordering the stories so as to form a novel. He chose the Arthurian Cycle as a model, whether facetiously or seriously remains a controversy. For the most part, the various stories could be fitted into the general scheme. Those seemingly unrelated

interchapters introduce other residents of Tortilla Flat and allow for greater characterization. The paisanos take on more depth as their activities reveal a concern for the misfortunes of others; and their susceptibility to female wiles, though told a bit bawdily, makes them appear more real while adding to the farcical aspects of the novel. In those cases where the stories could not be handled as experiences of the protagonists themselves, Steinbeck lets his characters tell the stories in the guise of conversational entertainment, for example the previously mentioned Ravanno story.

The episodes in Cannery Row are similar to those of Tortilla Flat in that some contribute to plot development and others serve a different function. The plot centers upon the endeavors of Mack and the boys to give a party for Doc. In addition to the series of episodes which build the plot to its conclusion with the successful second party and the morning after, there are several interchapters which, as in the Tortilla Flat interchapters, introduce other characters in Cannery Row and Monterey and lead to a fuller understanding of the main characters and events. French notes that "the chapters carrying forward the main narrative . . . actually follow (as is most fitting in a novel set on a seacoast) the pattern of a wave, growing slowly, hitting a reef or barrier, dividing and crashing prematurely, reforming, rising to a great height and crashing at last on

the beach itself."⁵ The analogy is well-chosen, with the premature break being the disastrous first party and the final crashing representing the second party with "Doc alone clearing up in its wake" in the closing pages.⁶

The interchapters of Cannery Row are, in most cases, less humorous than those chapters furthering the plot, but their variety and complexity make them as entertaining and vastly more thought-provoking. By the time Steinbeck wrote Cannery Row, his use of intercalary materials, usually in the form of interchapters, had developed considerably. The function of these episodes, which is suggested in Tortilla Flat by including characters and events beyond the limited demands of the plot, becomes clearest in The Grapes of Wrath in which the interchapters extend the story of the Joads to a universal one. There can be little doubt that the purpose of the interchapters in Cannery Row is also universalization. Like those in The Grapes of Wrath, the interchapters in Cannery Row form a regularly alternating pattern, with only occasional deviations. French goes to great length to explain the reasons for the deviations and to build a case for an uninterrupted regularity in which the even-numbered chapters would be the interchapters,⁷ a point which hardly seems pertinent to this discussion.

A study of the interchapters of the various novels reveals the complexity of Steinbeck's fiction. It is clear that The Grapes of Wrath is not only the story of the Joads

but also the story of all migrants and, by extension, all oppressed and dispossessed people everywhere at all times. As early as Tortilla Flat this approach was apparent. Tortilla Flat is not only the story of how Danny's House developed and died; it is also the story of all paisanos-- their love of life and their concern for one another as well as their tolerance and understanding of the weakness of others. By the same token, Cannery Row is more than the story of Mack and the boys' efforts to give a party for Doc. It is the story of the life and inhabitants of Cannery Row. The mysterious Chinaman, the Malloys in their boiler home renting out sleeping quarters in pipes, half-witted Frankie offering abject love to Doc, Dora and her angels of mercy, Henri the painter, the Talbots and their mutual concern, Willard and Joey with their interdependence--all of these are as much a part of Cannery Row as Mack and the boys, Doc, or Lee Chong.

Sweet Thursday picks up the threads of Cannery Row, compressing the happenings of several years into the opening chapter. Again, the main plot revolves around "doing something for Doc," but this time the party is not an end but a means to an end--getting Doc a girl. The demands of the musical comedy approach result in a stricter ordering of materials, thus tending, as Lisca notes, to isolate "the relatively few interchapters."⁸ However, those episodes unrelated to plot serve the same function as the intercalary

passages of Steinbeck's other novels, even though they are not as well integrated. In the "Prologue" of Sweet Thursday, Steinbeck defends an author's right to intervene with extraneous materials and announces that in this work such intervention will be in the form of chapters clearly labeled "hooptedoodle." But a reader must not be taken in by such playfulness. Not all intercalary chapters are so labeled, and the third chapter, titled "Hooptedoodle," has direct bearing on the plot.

Interspersed among the plot-related episodes are those dealing with the life and philosophy of Joseph and Mary Rivas. Others involve the activities of the girls at the Bear Flag and Fauna's concern with making ladies and wives out of her "hustlers." These episodes acquaint the reader with characters outside the limited group of protagonists, just as similar episodes do in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. There are also the episodes of Doc's meeting the seer on the beach, "The Great Roque War," and "The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival," which are tinged with bitter satire while commenting on society at large in a manner reminiscent of the Josh Billings episode in Cannery Row and achieving the effect of universalization.

A second structural technique that Steinbeck uses in the trilogy is the preface. Here again the device is not unique in the trilogy. In Burning Bright he begins with what is titled a "Foreword," which is signed. It is an

objective discussion of the play-novelette as a genre and has no bearing on the specific work. In the Monterey novels these preliminary discussions which are variously titled-- "Preface" in Tortilla Flat, "Cannery Row" in Cannery Row, and "Prologue" in Sweet Thursday--are really part of the novels. A similar explanatory narrative in The Pastures of Heaven is presented as the first chapter of the work. In the trilogy these prefaces serve two functions as Steinbeck sets the stage for the novels: they introduce the characters, and they explain the general form the author plans to use in presenting his materials.

By the time each novel begins, the reader is already acquainted with and sympathetic toward Danny and his friends or Mack and the other inhabitants of Cannery Row. In the "Preface" of Tortilla Flat it is learned that a paisano "is a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican, and assorted Caucasian bloods," that "he speaks English with a paisano accent and Spanish with a paisano accent," and that Danny and his friends are paisanos. The paisanos' general personality and attitude toward life is discovered in the recounting of their induction into the army. In Cannery Row the opening remarks reveal the polyglot make-up of the Row. The daytime activity centered in the canneries is described, and the real inhabitants of Cannery Row are introduced--the bums, Dora's girls, Henri the painter, Lee Chong the grocer, and Doc of the Western Biological Laboratory. Since Sweet Thursday is

intentionally a continuation of the history of Cannery Row, the "Prologue" is written in a different style. Steinbeck assumes an acquaintance with the earlier novel and recounts a discussion of Mack and the boys. Nonetheless, it does serve the purpose of introducing, if not all of the characters, the main ones who set the mood for the narrative to come.

Not only is the reader familiar with the main characters of each novel after reading the preface, but he also knows the general form the novel will take. Steinbeck begins Tortilla Flat with the following:

This is the story of Danny and of Danny's friends and of Danny's house. It is a story of how these three became one thing. . . . For Danny's house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny's friends were not unlike the knights of it. And this is the story of how that group came into being, of how it flourished and grew to be an organization beautiful and wise. . . . In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated (p. 1).

Thus the reader is prepared for the use of Malory's Morte d'Arthur as the model for the novel.

For Cannery Row Steinbeck chooses a form compatible with the biological emphasis of that novel:

How can the poem and the stink and the grating noise [of Cannery Row]--the quality of light, the tone, the habit, and the dream--be set down alive? When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole, for they break and tatter under the touch. You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book--to open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves (p. 2).

This method allows for the diversity and plasticity of the episodes. Being forewarned, the reader is prepared for a more fluid structure in the novel.

Mack himself, rather than Steinbeck, sets down the rules for the more rigid structure of Sweet Thursday. "I ain't never been satisfied with that book Cannery Row," he says. His suggestions for improvement include putting "a couple of words at the top" of each chapter "so it tells . . . what the chapter's going to be about," having "a lot of talk" because "I don't like to have nobody tell me what the guy that's talking looks like," and using description to tell "what color a thing is, how it smells and maybe how it looks, and maybe how a guy feels about it--but not too much of that." But Mack feels that "the guy's writing" should have the right "to break loose with a bunch of hooptedoodle." However, Mack says, "I wish it was set aside so I don't have to read it. I don't want hooptedoodle to get mixed up in the story. . . . Then I can skip it if I want to, or maybe go back to it after I know how the story come out" ("Prologue"). As mentioned earlier, Steinbeck's "hooptedoodle" is not always properly labeled. Robert De Mott suggests that this is Steinbeck's way of letting the reader know who is in charge. He follows Mack's suggestions sufficiently for the reader to know how the novel will be structured, but he retains the right to "throw us off the track by 'violating' Mack's credo to prove beyond a doubt he is in control of his materials."⁹

The third structural device Steinbeck uses in the trilogy is chapter titles. There is little that can be said about this device except to note its use and the fact that it is unique in the trilogy and even here is used in only two of the novels. Steinbeck used chapter titles first in Tortilla Flat, ostensibly in imitation of Malory's Morte d'Arthur. Reinstatement of chapter titles in Sweet Thursday, the sequel to Cannery Row, seems a deliberate attempt to unite the three novels, in light of the fact that these are the only instances in which Steinbeck used them. The reason for the omission of chapter titles in Cannery Row may be that the form of that novel is more organic, growing out of the tide pool imagery; whereas Tortilla Flat and Sweet Thursday follow a pre-established format.

The chapter titles in Sweet Thursday differ from those of Tortilla Flat in that they are brief and often cryptic, while the titles in Tortilla Flat are long, explanatory, and easily understood. All of the titles begin with how, except two which begin with of, and they describe adequately the happenings related in the chapters. Even though the titles in Sweet Thursday are not as clearly detailed, they serve the same function as those of Tortilla Flat. They range from symbolic--"The Creative Cross," "Flower in a Crannied Wall"--to whimsical--"Suzy Binds the Cheese," "O Frabjous Day"--to specific--"What Happened in Between," "Enter Suzy." But each title relates to the material covered in the titled chapter.

The most evolutionary of the structural techniques in the trilogy is the use of parties as a motif. It is also a technique peculiar to the Monterey novels. Each of the novels consists of a series of convivial get-togethers, many ending on a less than convivial note; and each of the novels climaxes with a party. However, in each case the climaxing party brings different results.

In Tortilla Flat the paisanos are always in a mood to celebrate or at least share a bottle of wine. Most of their nights are filled with drinking and conversation, usually ending in fighting, which is almost as exhilarating to the paisanos as drinking. One such party ended with the accidental burning of Danny's rent house, both a tragedy and a relief for the paisanos. The big party, though, develops as the answer to Danny's sadness. Danny's Friends (Steinbeck always capitalized when referring to the group as a specific character) decide that what Danny needs to cheer him is a party, and they are prepared to make the supreme sacrifice. They go to work cutting squid.

Tortilla Flat was transformed. Everyone considered himself a friend of Danny; therefore, everyone must contribute to the making of the party.

Mrs. Morales dusted her phonograph and picked out her loudest records. . . . Mrs. Soto descended upon her chicken yard with a cleaver. Mrs. Palochico poured a bag of sugar into her largest cooking pot to make dulces. A delegation of girls went into the Woolworth store in Monterey and bought the complete stock of colored crepe paper. Guitars and accordians cried experimentally through the Flat (p. 138).

Everyone brought out his finest attire, and everyone made sure he contributed something to the party--food, candles, whiskey, wine. It was a party of the highest order. When Danny arrived, it was in full swing, and "Danny defied emulation as a celebrant" (p. 142). It was at this point that Danny was "translated." He became a god and "challenged the world." Finding no one willing to fight, he went in search of "The Enemy . . . worthy of Danny" (p. 143). Danny's death brings the party to an abrupt end. In French's opinion, "Tortilla Flat is ultimately a tragedy."¹⁰ It is doubtful that Steinbeck saw it as such; for Danny is no longer mortal, and tragedy is a human experience. The paisanos understand Danny's apotheosis when they offer up Danny's House as a burnt offering.

Like the paisanos, the characters of Cannery Row spent most of their nights in drinking and conversation. And though the disaster accompanying the first party, which got out of hand and left Doc's laboratory in a shambles before he arrived, might be compared to the party that resulted in the burning of Danny's rent house, the Cannery Row event was a planned affair. Nonetheless, there are similarities in that both Danny's friends and Mack and the boys were contrite and feared recrimination. Also, in both cases, the owners (Danny and Doc) were not in attendance. However, Danny's forgiveness was coupled with relief at being rid of an encumbrance; whereas Doc's forgiveness grew out of his

resignation to and tolerance of the ways of Mack and the boys.

The second party, which is the climax of Cannery Row, bears some resemblance to its forerunner in Tortilla Flat. It grew out of a gesture of friendship, was intended as a surprise for the guest of honor, and it involved the entire community. But it has basic and important differences. The Tortilla Flat party exploded spontaneously in one day and Danny really was surprised. In Cannery Row the party was planned for several days. It was to be a birthday party, and it was inevitable that Doc should find out, which was just as well for it allowed him time to make preparations of his own. Most importantly, in Cannery Row Steinbeck maintains the biological metaphor that is used throughout the novel. "The nature of parties has been imperfectly studied," he says. "It is, however, generally understood that a party has a pathology, that it is a kind of an individual" (p. 114).

This second party began rather stiffly and formally, but as more guests arrived bringing gifts and joining in drinks, it became more relaxed. People felt warm and introspective as Doc played Monteverdi and read a poem, "Black Marigolds," translated from Sanskrit. The party did not really begin, though, until the crew of the San Pedro tuna boat arrived and touched off a fight by insulting Dora's girls, who were off duty at the time. After that "you could hear the roar of the party from end to end of Cannery Row."

The police came to investigate and joined in. The San Pedro crew "crept humbly back" and "were embraced and admired." The festivities were capped off by the lighting of Lee Chong's gift--"the twenty-five foot string of firecrackers" (p. 119).

Unlike Danny, Doc is not "translated." He does not join the ranks in the celestial sphere. The morning after finds him still very mortal. He has seen "the whitest pouring of eternal light," but his activities are the mundane tasks of clearing away the debris. The illusory world of Tortilla Flat has become the reality of Cannery Row.

As with the two earlier novels of the trilogy, the preoccupation with drinking and partying continues in Sweet Thursday. However, there is no precursor to the climactic event. There is talk of previous parties, especially the two given for Doc in Cannery Row, each of which left Doc's laboratory in a shambles; but there is only one real party in the novel, and it is a "bull-bitch tom-wallager." This time it is the Palace Flophouse that receives the onslaught. The purpose of the party is two-fold: to get Doc and Suzy together and to save the Palace Flophouse for Mack and the boys by getting it out of Rivas' hands and into Doc's by means of a raffle. Only Mack and the boys are aware of the second reason. Both aims misfire.

In keeping with the musical comedy mode, the party is to be a masquerade using the Snow White theme. The idea is Fauna's; she sees a chance to let Suzy be Snow White

and dress her as a bride. They were taking no chances of Doc's not getting the hint. The preparations and the party alike are farcical to the point of slapstick, including the tasteless costuming of Hazel as Prince Charming. Unlike the last party at Doc's, this one began in full swing. "At least two hours before the signal a series of small earnest parties . . . were practicing for the main event" (p. 168). In spite of the careful preparations, this party too had its own perverse pathology. Nothing went right from Hazel's embarrassing entrance, to the ill-fated raffle when Mack learns that the Flophouse belonged to him and the boys all along, to Suzy's stunning entrance and pathetic exit. The party does accomplish two things. It marks the turning point for Suzy as she decides to improve herself, and it marks Doc's capitulation to his need for Suzy and, in a larger sense, to his need for reconciliation with society in general. From that point on, the novel deteriorates into a sentimental romance in which Hazel rises to heights of greatness as he becomes the catalyst for uniting the lovers.

Sweet Thursday is inferior to Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row in many ways. It is flawed primarily because Steinbeck was aiming in two directions. His interest in the theater led him to styling his work with the stage in mind. At the same time, he was glancing back at Monterey and the successful formula of his two earlier novels set there. Thus, like the party in the novel, Sweet Thursday is a masquerade. It wears the costume of a musical comedy romance. But beneath

the frills stands its basic structure using the same devices that characterize Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row.

Because the episodic approach typical of Steinbeck's works in general is most obvious, the common bond of structure is perhaps not as easily recognized in the Monterey novels as are common setting and tone. However, an investigation of the structural techniques of each results in even greater support for the contention that the three are a trilogy. The episodic nature of the novels, along with the use of prefaces and chapter titles and especially the recurring party as a climactic event, clearly unites the novels.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

- ¹Lisca, Wide World, pp. 58-60.
- ²Fontenrose, p. 20.
- ³John Steinbeck to McIntosh and Otis, Jan. 1933, cited by Lisca, Wide World, pp. 72-73.
- ⁴Street, p. 38.
- ⁵French, p. 122.
- ⁶French, pp. 122-123.
- ⁷French, pp. 124-134.
- ⁸Lisca, Wide World, p. 278.
- ⁹De Mott, pp. 168-169.
- ¹⁰French, p. 59.

CHAPTER VI

UNIFICATION THROUGH FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERS

A final common element that warrants consideration in the Monterey Trilogy is Steinbeck's use of the same characters. Here again, an evolutionary process can be seen. Similitude rather than duplication is the unifying characteristic. Characters in Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday fall into two categories; there are those typical in Steinbeck's fiction and those unique in the trilogy. The recurrent types include the prostitute and the mental deficient, and peculiar to the trilogy is Steinbeck's use of the group acting as a single character as well as the various character types which have counterparts in each of the novels. Character differences stem from Steinbeck's ability to give individuality to each character while simultaneously presenting representative types. Differences also result from the need to adjust personalities to the demands of the novels according to the shift in mode of presentation.

Steinbeck's use of characterization is in keeping with his aim at universality. This aim has already been noted as the purpose of intercalary passages or interchapters as a structural technique. Steinbeck's characters are representative; they are also symbols. Therefore, while Steinbeck

usually succeeds in giving each an individual treatment, his characters are recognizable types. Already mentioned in the chapter on themes is the chronicler of events, the commentator who stands apart from the group and speculates on its actions. The characters in the trilogy are also representative types. Some are typical of Steinbeck's works in general, while others are peculiar to the trilogy.

Two recurrent character types which Steinbeck includes in the Monterey novels are the big-hearted prostitute and the mental deficient. Except for the perverted Cathy Ames in East of Eden, there is not an evil prostitute in a long line of professionals and semi-professionals in Steinbeck fiction, beginning with the Lopez sisters in The Pastures of Heaven and including Camille Oaks in The Wayward Bus and the trusting Kate in East of Eden. Sweets Ramirez and Cornelia Ruiz of Tortilla Flat are self-seeking and fickle, but they are not evil; and the girls of the Bear Flag under the care of Dora in Cannery Row and the tutelage of Fauna in Sweet Thursday squabble among themselves occasionally, but they are always ready to help in times of need and are recognized by all, except the "lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters," as performing a service to the community.

The mental deficient is probably the most ubiquitous of Steinbeck character types. The dwarf Tularecito, who believed he was a gnome in The Pastures of Heaven and Willie Romas in To a God Unknown, who had prophetic nightmares and

"never was very strong in the head," are the forerunners of a procession of weak-minded individuals with remarkable insight, such as Lennie in Of Mice and Men and Noah in The Grapes of Wrath. Frankie of Cannery Row, to whom Doc became an idol, is the traditional Steinbeck retardate who is never able to find a place in his world.

The Pirate in Tortilla Flat and Hazel in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday are different. The paisanos know that the Pirate's "head had not grown up with his body," but Danny and his friends take him in. It is true that their original motive is not the highest, for greed is at work; but when the innocent and trusting Pirate confides in them as friends by putting his savings in their custody, they do not exploit or reject him. He becomes one of the group and shares equally in the attendant responsibilities and benefits.

Likewise, Hazel is a member in full standing at the Palace Flophouse. It is even learned in Sweet Thursday, despite the statement in Cannery Row that "no one knows who named the house" (Cannery Row, p. 8), that it was in fact Hazel who "had given the Palace Flophouse its name . . . when the boys had first moved in" (Sweet Thursday, p. 166). His mother, having had seven girls, named him Hazel after a great aunt with life insurance before she realized her eighth child was male, by which time "she was used to the name and never bothered to change it. Hazel grew up--did four years

in grammar school, four years in reform school, and didn't learn anything either place" (Cannery Row, p. 19). His "mind was like wandering alone in a deserted museum." It "was choked with uncatalogued exhibits" (Cannery Row, p. 20). In Sweet Thursday, Hazel had managed somehow to get into the army "long enough to qualify for the G. I. Bill, and he enrolled at the University of California for training in astro-physics by making a check mark on an application." His college career lasted three months before "the college authorities discovered him. . . . Hazel often wondered what it was that he had gone to study" (Sweet Thursday, pp. 4-5). Hazel is safe from the possible abuse of civilization, but "if Mack and the boys and Doc hadn't been his friends, there's no telling what might have happened to him. Hazel thought Mack was the world's greatest human, while Doc he didn't consider human at all. Sometimes he said prayers to Doc" (Sweet Thursday, p. 186). It was this worship of Doc, coupled with Fauna's astrological prediction that Hazel was destined to become president of the United States, that prompted Hazel's efforts toward greatness, a struggle that completely exhausted him. However, Hazel was secure in his knowledge that he belonged to the group, and it is Mack's and Fauna's concern that soothes his battered brain.

Prostitutes and retardates are present in the majority of Steinbeck's fiction. Important, however, in unifying the Monterey novels is the inclusion of characters who differ

from the usual Steinbeck type, either in personality, function, or importance. The most obvious of these characters are the protagonists. It is not difficult to recognize Mack and the boys as Anglo versions of Danny and his friends. Charles R. Metzger's footnote to his article "Steinbeck's Mexican-Americans" says this:

Although Steinbeck promised in his 1937 "Foreword" to Tortilla Flat to refrain from exposing . . . the paisanos of his fiction to harm by ever again telling any of their stories, and though literally he kept that promise . . . , he did not give up presenting in his fiction the carefree and admirable types of characters they represent. Transformed, perhaps Anglicised, they appear again in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday as Mack and the boys. . . . If they had been given last names, . . . we might be able to tell whether the boys are still paisanos or not. I suspect that Steinbeck didn't want his readers to know, nor to care, since his principal concern with such characters was social, moral, esthetic, rather than ethnic.¹

Although there is little doubt that Mack and the boys are Anglo, Metzger's observations concerning their being the same types of characters and Steinbeck's primary aim not being ethnic is valid. The fact that these characters have accepted the position of dropout and either adapt to that position outside society (as do the paisanos of Tortilla Flat) or ignore society (as do Mack and the boys) makes them unique in Steinbeck fiction. In Steinbeck's other works the isolated or rejected usually attempt to adjust and find a place in society. The migrants of In Dubious Battle, George and Lennie in Of Mice and Men, and the Joads in The Grapes of Wrath all strive to improve their plight and gain a measure of status. In contrast, the protagonists

of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday do not even acknowledge that their relationship to society is a plight. Even in Sweet Thursday, where Suzy and Doc accept some of the mores of middle class respectability, there is no evidence that Mack and the boys intend any such compromise.

The groups in each of the three novels must be considered as single organisms, for they effectively represent Steinbeck's group man theory. Viewed this way, many resemblances can be noted. The first similarity, of course, is the general attitude which has just been discussed. In each novel the group's attitude toward society is rejection of its rules and tacit acceptance or amused tolerance of those ensnared by the work ethic. The paisanos show no animosity toward the industrious workers and businessmen of Monterey. They simply restrict their dealings with them to times of emergency and do not allow themselves to be proselytized. Mack and the boys gingerly pick their way through a maze of demands while avoiding any permanent commitment. When their needs cannot be met by borrowing or stealing, they accept casual labor, collecting specimens for Doc or working in the canneries, to meet the emergency of the moment. They respect Dora's and Fauna's business prowess and avail themselves of Lee Chong's or Joseph and Mary Rivas' wares, and they admire Doc's scientific interests; but they feel no need for a vocation of their own.

Strangely enough, although their actions are characteristically outside the law, the paisanos and the Cannery Row people are on friendly terms with the authorities and find no horror in being jailed. Tito Ralph, the jailer in Tortilla Flat, is considered a friend by the paisanos, all of whom had spent many happy hours in his jail. The motorcycle policeman Jake Lake, who patrolled Tortilla Flat "to see that good things come to no evil," was also a friend to the paisanos (Tortilla Flat, p. 92). Big Joe Portagee was well acquainted with jails. During his time in the army, he "spent considerably more time in jail than out." Since he had had "a decent training in the Monterey jail," he was "saved . . . the misery of patriotism thwarted," for it was "his conviction that as a man's days are rightly devoted half to sleeping and half to waking, so a man's years are rightly spent half in jail and half out" (Tortilla Flat, p. 55). "The Portagee liked the Monterey jail. It was a place to meet people. If he stayed there long enough, all his friends were in and out" (Tortilla Flat, p. 57). Typical of the relationship between the paisanos and the police was the reaction to the unusual activity as Tortilla Flat prepared for the big party for Danny. "A carful of apprehensive policemen drove up from Monterey. 'Oh, it is only a party. Sure, we'll have a glass of wine. Don't kill anybody'" (Tortilla Flat, p. 139).

Mack and the boys do not spend as much time in jail as the paisanos, but their relationship with the authorities is as amiable. In telling how Gay came to live at the Flophouse, Hazel describes the comforts of the new jail in Salinas which has evidently replaced the old Monterey jail of Tortilla Flat. Since the completion of the new jail with radio, "good bunks," and a "nice fellow" for sheriff, Mrs. Gay had increasing difficulty controlling her husband and was forced to start hitting him in his sleep. This interrupted Gay's rest, so he finally left her and moved in with Mack and the boys (Cannery Row, p. 20). Like Joe Portagee, though, Gay had trouble staying out of jail. In fact, he was in jail when he heard about the birthday party for Doc, but "he made a deal with the sheriff to get off that night and borrowed two dollars from him for a round trip bus ticket" (Cannery Row, pp. 105-106). The night of the party the police "cruised up," responding to the noise made by the fight that the San Pedro crew started; but by the time they arrived, the party had retreated inside Doc's laboratory with the "broken door closed" and "the party . . . sitting in the dark giggling happily and drinking wine," so "the cops didn't find anything." It was not long, though, before a "fresh contingent" from the Bear Flag sparked a resurgence. "And then the party really got going. The cops came back, looked in, clicked their tongues and joined it. Mack and the boys used the squad car to go . . . for more wine. . . . A woman five blocks away called the police to complain about

the noise and couldn't get anyone" (Cannery Row, p. 119).

There is no evidence that the police were in attendance at the masquerade party in Sweet Thursday, because the plot required that no one outside Cannery Row be privy to the disastrous events. However, the character of Constable Joe Blaikey is sympathetically drawn so that one realizes the same relationship exists here between the representatives of the law and the protagonists as existed in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. Blaikey gives Suzy advice and, later, lends her money. The respect between Joe Blaikey and Fauna, madam of the Bear Flag, is mutual.

Another similarity which is interesting to note is that each group consists of six characters. Danny's House shelters six paisanos--Danny, Pilon, Pablo, Jesus Maria Corcoran, the Pirate, and finally Big Joe Portagee. The boys living at the Palace Flophouse in Cannery Row also number six--Mack, Eddie, Hazel, Hughie, Jones, and later, Gay. In Sweet Thursday, Mack, Hazel, and Eddie remain; Hughie and Jones have been replaced by Whitey No. 1 and Whitey No. 2; and Gay, though killed in the war, is present in spirit, as repeated references in the novel reveal. The original choice of six characters for Danny's House was probably arbitrary. The continued use of that number for Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday may be Steinbeck's way of hinting, as Metzger's footnote suggests, that the escapades of Mack and the boys are, in fact, a continuation of the paisanos' exploits.

In addition to group similarities, individual characters in the novels have their counterparts. The slow-witted Pirate and Hazel have already been compared. The jailbird Joe Portagee finds a counterpart of a sort in Gay. Most interesting, though, is the unusual relationship among Danny, Pilon, Mack, and Doc.

On the surface it appears that Danny and Mack are parallels. Danny is head of the household of paisanos, and Mack is "the elder, leader, mentor, and to a small extent the exploiter of a little group of men who had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment" (Cannery Row, p. 6). However, Danny is raised above the other paisanos by his inheritance. There was a time when he had been just another paisano, sleeping in the woods and living the wild, carefree life. "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" (Tortilla Flat, p. 124).

On the other hand, Mack has no such burden. The Palace Flophouse is rented and the responsibility for its upkeep is shared by all. Mack remains one of the boys. His main characteristic is his function as philosopher, logician and con artist. It is he who instigates each of the parties for Doc, and Mack has opinions about everything from medicine to the best time to catch frogs. He knows that there

is no need to carry food on a trip to the country because that is where food comes from, and he figures that whiskey is preferable to beer because "when you buy beer, you're buying too much tare" (Cannery Row, p. 27). Finally, it is Mack, the master of persuasion, who blackmails Lee Chong into renting the Palace Flophouse, arranges purchase of a stove which is paid for with an I.O.U. for eighty cents, gains permission from the owner of the property on which they had trespassed by appealing to the man's concern for his sick dog and then getting the man drunk, and fast-talks Joseph and Mary Rivas into participating in the raffling off of the Flophouse.

These characteristics stamp Mack's personality as being more like Pilon's, for it is Pilon who is the philosopher and con man in Tortilla Flat. He is the one who warns Danny, "Thou art lifted above thy friends" (Tortilla Flat, p. 9). Pilon knows that one should "never under any circumstances bring feathers, head or feet home, for without these a chicken cannot be identified" (p. 12). Besides practical knowledge, he has also a knowledge of theology. When Pablo wonders whether a mass paid for by money Cornelia Ruiz has earned from prostitution has any virtue in helping her father's soul, Pilon responds, "A mass is a mass. . . . 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 to God. He just likes them, the same as you like wine" (p. 21).

Pilon talks Pablo and Jesus Maria into renting part of his house, and he talks the Pirate out of his money. He also retrieves the motorless vacuum cleaner when Danny's ardor wanes and swaps it to Torrelli for wine so that the machine cannot be traced to him but its benefits need not be sacrificed. Finally, like Mack in the two later novels, Pilon is the one who suggests the party to cheer up Danny.

Recognizing these various similarities leads to the realization that Mack is really a closer copy of Pilon than of Danny. More accurately, Danny's counterpart in Cannery Row is Doc. The fact that Steinbeck patterned Doc after his friend Edward Ricketts obscures a comparison of the two. The similarities between Doc and Ricketts have been noted often and by several critics. Therefore, an analysis of this aspect of Doc's character hardly seems necessary here. Another observation that requires little more than mentioning is that the character of Doc reflects a great deal of the author himself. This is particularly true in Sweet Thursday. In speaking of Sweet Thursday and the change in Doc's characterization, Lisca says that "what makes all of this so interesting to the student of Steinbeck is that in Doc's surrender to romantic love it is possible to see Steinbeck's own capitulation to his materials, as suggested by the fact that the personality of Doc had been the author's mask in every book from The Pastures of Heaven up to Burning Bright."² The importance of Doc to the trilogy, however,

lies in his role in the novels, and it is this role that clarifies his relationship to Danny.

From the beginning Danny is above the other paisanos. As noted earlier, the opening episode of the novel reveals Danny's superiority when he is sent to Texas to break mules rather than being put in the infantry like the others. When he returns from the war, he is already an heir. From this point the separation between Danny and his friends continues until his final "translation" at which time he becomes a god.

In a similar way, Doc is isolated from the other inhabitants of Cannery Row. He is "the fountain of philosophy and science and art" (Cannery Row, p. 17). Hazel's and Frankie's adoration of Doc is only slightly more than the high regard in which the others hold Doc. Mack's awareness of Doc's superiority is reflected in his belief that "Doc wouldn't like this stuff from the winin' jug," referring to the mixture that Eddie scavenged when he filled in for Whitey at La Ida's. He supports his statement with, "He's been to college. Once I seen a dame in a fur coat go in there. Never did see her come out. It was two o'clock the last I looked--and that church music goin'. No--you couldn't offer him none of this" (Cannery Row, p. 26). Lisca notes that Doc "completes the human community by serving as its local deity."³ Though in Sweet Thursday Doc has changed and reveals human weakness, he is still set apart from the rest of the community and finally is "translated" as he and

Suzy bounce off in their chariot headed for the spring tides and matrimony. Although Doc's translation does not make him a god, it does put an end to loneliness; and there can be little doubt that it puts Doc on a plane still farther removed from Mack and the boys.

Thus, while the patterning of Doc after Ricketts requires him to live at the laboratory, thus precluding his living at the Palace Flophouse, his role in the novels is the same as Danny's. Moreover, it seems more than mere coincidence that Doc eventually acquires the Flophouse in a manner not too dissimilar from Danny's inheriting his house. Both were the result of chance.

A final representative character to consider is that of the businessman. Torrelli in Tortilla Flat, Lee Chong in Cannery Row, and Joseph and Mary Rivas in Sweet Thursday play similar roles in the novels. They supply basic needs to the protagonists. Torrelli's merchandise is alcoholic, but the paisanos also manage to get food and wood there. Chong and Rivas run what is called a grocery but is in reality "a miracle of supply," stocking everything from Old Tennis Shoes whiskey to machinery. Since Torrelli is an Italian name and the man has none of the paisanos' traits, it is safe to assume that he is Italian. With this understanding, another similarity can be noted. In each of the novels, the businessman is of a different ethnic background from the protagonists. The personalities of the men differ,

however. Lisca notes that Lee Chong "is the opposite of Torrelli, . . . who attempts to survive [the paisanos] . . . by cheating and chicanery, but is himself mercilessly cheated at every opportunity."⁴ On the other hand, "Lee Chong is successful in Cannery Row because he does not fight his environment."⁵ Like everyone else in Sweet Thursday, though, Lee Chong has changed. He has sold his business and sailed away to the South Seas chasing a dream. In his stead is Joseph and Mary Rivas, who is strangely ethical for all of his unethical practices. He bought the grocery as a cover for his illicit wetback trade. His plan backfired somewhat, and instead of running a center for farm laborers, he wound up with a band of musicians, which is handy for a musical comedy plot. The people of Cannery Row like Rivas, but they do not trust him. Yet, there is no evidence that he is any more dishonest in his dealings with his customers than was Lee Chong, who was not averse to taking advantage of a profitable situation, such as inflating prices when Mack and the boys were using frogs as currency. Basically, the businessmen serve the same purpose in the trilogy. Their character differences reflect the approach of each novel. Torrelli serves as a ploy for the paisanos' tricks in Tortilla Flat; Lee Chong is part of the eco-system of Cannery Row; and Rivas furthers the musical comedy plot of Sweet Thursday.

Steinbeck's use of characterization, then, is another unifying element in the Monterey novels. Like setting, tone,

themes, and structure, the characters not only reflect differences in keeping with the demands of each novel, but their representativeness provides an important link among the novels. The fact that Steinbeck includes types recurring in many of his other works as well as presenting a cast unique in the trilogy makes the relationship among Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday even more significant. Clearly, these novels must be considered as a unit within the Steinbeck canon.

NOTES

CHAPTER VI

¹in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, p. 155.

²Lisca, Wide World, p. 281.

³Lisca, Wide World, p. 212.

⁴Lisca, Wide World, p. 202.

⁵Lisca, Wide World, pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MONTEREY TRILOGY IN THE STEINBECK CANON

John Steinbeck's reputation as a novelist must rest ultimately on his stature as an artist and craftsman, and the Monterey novels significantly contribute to his reputation. The unusual nature of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday which distinguishes them from his more serious works allows a sharper focus on Steinbeck's handling of his materials without its being obscured by a consideration of contemporary social issues. Although social issues are dealt with in the trilogy, they are not accorded the prominence they receive in such works as the migrant novels of the thirties, The Wayward Bus, or The Winter of Our Discontent. Each of the trilogy novels was written with entertainment the primary aim; thus his craftsmanship and artistic ability are perhaps more clearly discernible.

Steinbeck's concern with contemporary problems resulted in his being viewed in the thirties as a proletarian novelist. More recently, he has been classified as a journalistic novelist, no doubt partly for the same reason. The tendency of critics to categorize writers has led also to Steinbeck's being labeled a naturalist, a sentimentalist or romanticist,

and an allegorist or fabulist. Obviously, these various classifications represent a variety of approaches, ranging from a study of style or technique to philosophy. They also reveal a diversity in Steinbeck's fiction which has led to confusion and frustration for critics trying to assign a definitive term to his works. Gray notes that "while he lived Steinbeck was regarded by many of his critics as a kind of perennial apprentice. He experimented with many forms and . . . none of his books was like any other. He seemed always to be beginning anew and this suggested to some that he lacked a sense of direction."¹

In their search for consistency in Steinbeck's fiction, critics often failed to note the consistency within individual works; this limited view led to disdain. Harry Thornton Moore, in his critical survey of Steinbeck's novels in 1939, was among the first to praise Steinbeck's talent. His closing paragraph begins: "He [Steinbeck] thinks it is mathematically predictable that the crowd will one day turn on him. This is not too unlikely, considering the fickleness of the American public."² Ironically, it was not the public but the critics who turned; for in 1957 Moore himself wrote: "Over the years he has become the idol of book clubs and movie audiences, and of a vast uninstructed reading public. Critics of high standing have either ignored Steinbeck or, in books and journals of limited circulation, have exposed his defects."³ As Robert Murray Davis says, "The

most striking feature of John Steinbeck's current reputation is that his audience would rather read than praise him."⁴

Currently, all of Steinbeck's works except Bombs Away are available in paperback in the United States and England. His works are also widely read in other countries. In 1968 alone, forty-four of Steinbeck's works were translated into twelve languages, in addition to those major works already in translation at the time.⁵ These facts attest to Steinbeck's continuing popularity. While popularity alone is not the best criterion for judging a writer's work, it cannot be entirely discounted, nor can it be attributed to what Dwight Macdonald calls "Midcult" appeal.⁶ Davis warns that "even the critic most fervent in support of high art and its audience should pause to ask if Steinbeck's popularity over thirty-five years and twenty-seven books may not spring from qualities lasting in the work and perceptive in the audience."⁷

These lasting qualities Davis lists as "traditional form, coherent and pleasing fictional worlds, and concrete textures" but he notes that "in order to endure . . . a writer must give us more." That something more Davis sees as Steinbeck's "deeply felt personal mythos" which is present throughout his works but is defined in Sea of Cortez.⁸ It derives from man's search for constancy in a changing world and a paradoxical view of illusion which is both necessary for survival and dangerous because it leads to isolation and self-destruction, since illusion, as Blake Nevius puts it,

is "ultimately powerless in the face of reality."⁹ In other words, man, in his search for absolutes, fears and resists change; and yet he must adapt in order to survive. He clings to his illusions of the ideal in order to make existence bearable, but in the end he is set apart.¹⁰

The Monterey Trilogy embodies all of these qualities--form, a coherent fictional world, concrete texture, and myth--qualities which distinguish a work as art rather than as simply journalism. Steinbeck's "personal mythos" is most easily recognized through the characters of Danny in Tortilla Flat and Doc in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday as they reveal the theme of isolation and loneliness. Both men are set apart, Danny by his inheritance and Doc by his education and his personal detachment as an interested but uninvolved observer. Danny resists the change that is incumbent with property. His illusion that he can continue as a peer of the other paisanos is finally shattered in the face of the reality of his responsibility. Doc pursues his lonely life in a limbo between the established society of his peers and the unorthodox activities of Cannery Row. In Cannery Row he seems able to accept his isolation, content with his music and the philosophy of "Black Marigolds"; but Sweet Thursday exposes him to reality when he is forced to confront change in the world and in himself. Doc's self-delusion is obvious in his periods of musing and in those passages describing the battling of his three voices. Steinbeck's illusion versus

reality theme, stemming from man's need for changelessness, is not the only element of the myth found in the fiction, but it is one which is more nearly constant as a reflection of Steinbeck's personal vision.

The use of a diversity of forms in the trilogy attests to Steinbeck's ability to handle a variety of materials and modes. For Tortilla Flat Steinbeck effectively translated the Arthurian cycle and King Arthur's Round Table to a twentieth century setting. In Cannery Row he chose an organic form. Rather than forcing an outside structure on the work, he took the tide pool as a central image and developed the novel appropriately by allowing the various episodes to "ooze and crawl of their own will" like the "flat worms" the marine biologist collects (Cannery Row, p. 2). For Sweet Thursday Steinbeck used the contemporary musical comedy form, complete with slapstick, ribaldry, boy-meets-girl romance, and a happy ending.

Within each of the novels Steinbeck has also created a believable fictional world. Although fashioned after Arthur's knights, the paisanos of Tortilla Flat were at all times paisanos. Even the heroic sounding language is acceptable as Spanish idiom. In fact, Steinbeck so successfully conveyed a sense of authenticity that the Monterey Chamber of Commerce denounced the book as a lie!¹¹¹ The world of Cannery Row is equally acceptable. Through description and characterization, Steinbeck creates a believable Cannery Row

whose inhabitants emphasize the more important values of friendship and enjoyment of life, rejecting the false values of a business-oriented society--a world that the reader is not only able to accept but to envy. The dialogue and incidents are so fitting in the world which Steinbeck has created that only the most prosaic would question the grasshopper existence of Mack and the boys, the ethics or validity of Dora, the girls at the Bear Flag, or Lee Chong. The world of Sweet Thursday does pose a problem for the reader. The beginning of the novel is believable enough and appears to continue the concrete world of Cannery Row with appropriate recognition of change. One is soon ushered into the fantastic world of musical comedy, however, and only by joining in the fantasy is he able to overlook the unevenness of the novel. The incongruity of attempting to merge the two worlds results in one of the major flaws in the work.

What Davis calls "concrete texture" refers to Steinbeck's inclusion of "actions and sensations" familiar to the reader which lends an immediacy to the work.¹² Steinbeck's fictional world is also palpable. The activities pursued in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday are real to the reader. Whether or not he has personally participated in the activity, it is not foreign to the human experience. The characters act. They collect marine specimens; they fix automobiles; they build things. Even the paisanos of Tortilla Flat work on occasion. The Pirate collects kindling, all of the paisanos

comb the beaches for flotsam; and when the need is sufficiently dire, they cut squid. It is Steinbeck's descriptions of these various activities that lend concreteness to his works.

Not all of Steinbeck's works reflect successful handling of materials; some of his works are inferior and rightly receive adverse criticism. As has been noted, Steinbeck's handling of his materials in Sweet Thursday is less than satisfactory. In spite of the more rigid structure imposed by the musical comedy plot, the novel does not hang together. It lacks the unity of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, where form, symbol, character, plot, and setting join to achieve a singular effect.

Nonetheless, the trilogy reveals that Steinbeck can and does use novelistic techniques effectively. He was a craftsman and artist, not just a reporter. Although he was not always successful in achieving his desired goal (few writers are), he can scarcely be written off as insignificant. His ability to handle a variety of narrative forms and to adjust his materials to meet the needs of each is clear evidence of his artistry and craftsmanship in the Monterey Trilogy.

NOTES

CHAPTER VII

¹Gray, p. 11.

²The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study (Folcroft, Pa.: The Folcroft Press, 1969), p. 96.

³"Steinbeck the Soft-Hearted Satirist," The New Republic, 27 May 1957, p. 23.

⁴"Introduction," Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 1.

⁵Davis, p. 1.

⁶Against the American Grain (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 40, cited by Davis, p. 4.

⁷Davis, p. 8.

⁸Davis, p. 12.

⁹"Steinbeck: One Aspect," Pacific Spectator, 3 (1949), rpt. in Steinbeck and His Critics, pp. 197-198.

¹⁰Davis, pp. 12-13.

¹¹Lisca, p. 75.

¹²Davis, p. 10.

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