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## Darkness Visible: The Moral Dilemma of Americans as Portrayed in the Early Short Fictions and Later Novels of John Steinbeck

Michael Meyer  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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DARKNESS VISIBLE:  
THE MORAL DILEMMA OF AMERICANS  
AS PORTRAYED IN THE EARLY SHORT FICTION AND LATER NOVELS  
OF  
JOHN STEINBECK

by  
Michael J. Meyer

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
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## VITA

The author, Michael Jon Meyer, is the son of Emil L. Meyer and Irene (Stoit) Meyer. He was born October 7, 1943, in Moline, Illinois.

His elementary education was obtained at Immanuel Lutheran School, Rock Island, Illinois, and secondary education at Rock Island Senior High School where he graduated in 1961, ranking 3rd in a class of 518.

In September, 1961, he entered Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois, and in June, 1965, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education with a concentration in English and American Literature. While attending Concordia, Meyer was also active in drama and writing, serving as an officer of the Concordia Players and as editor of The Pillars, the college yearbook and Motif, the college fine arts journal. He received several academic scholarships for excellence in the field of English and was elected to Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities in 1964 and 1965. From 1965-1967 he taught elementary school in Chicago.

In June, 1967, he married Lorelee Klotz of Chicago, Illinois. Their marriage has been blessed by three children: Kevin (1969), Craig (1971), and Christine (1975). In the fall of 1967, he returned to school at Loyola University, Chicago, to pursue a Master's degree in English.

Granted a graduate assistantship, he completed the degree requirements in January, 1969, and returned briefly to his alma mater to serve as an instructor of English.

In 1970, he accepted an offer to serve as Chairman of the English Department at Walther Lutheran High School, Melrose Park, Illinois, a position which he currently holds. In 1980, he was granted a year's sabbatical leave to pursue full time advanced study in English. He returned to Loyola to begin the Ph.D. in English and was admitted to candidacy in April, 1982. During the academic year 1980-1981, he again served as a graduate assistant in English and was honored as the first recipient of the Stanley Claves award for best graduate paper in English. He completed the dissertation graduation requirements for the doctorate in fall of 1985 and in January, 1986, he was awarded the Ph.D. in English.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### DARKNESS VISIBLE:

#### THE PROBLEM OF MORAL AMBIGUITY

Kenneth B. Clark, in an essay for The New York Times which appeared on February 16, 1975, related an incident which had a profound almost obsessive impact upon his own thoughts about the character and quality of American life. Clark, distinguished Professor of Psychology at City University of New York, was attending a seminar on the ethical and moral problems of America sponsored by the Aspen Institute in Colorado. Many prominent individuals were also in attendance, and one of their principal concerns was how big business could cope or come to terms with a prevailing functional immorality in the American free enterprise system. Surprisingly, most conference participants were no longer even shocked by disclosure of immoral and unethical practices in their capitalistic society, but were, in fact, rather comfortable with a generally accepted institutionalized immorality.

Clark's immediate observation was that this situation revealed a basic systemic problem in America - a fundamental problem of perspective, value, and character that created a chronic crisis : for many Americans, a virulent ethical and moral sickness was considered normative, competitive and necessary for efficiency, affluence and effectiveness.

As the essay continues, Clark accuses America of moral schizophrenia and points out that those who are sensitive to the problem are largely dismissed as starry-eyed moralists and sentimentalists. Consequently, these moral critics are ineffective because they do not appeal to the masses, who are apparently willing to accept "immoral" means needed to attain so-called "moral" ends. In fact, Clark's ultimate contention in his essay is that the American dilemma is a crisis of moral ambivalence. It is an honesty/dishonesty dilemma that pervades all dimensions of America's social, economic, political, educational and religious institutions - an infection that demands a cure if its society is to continue to exist. However, Clark is not so naive as to believe that moral ambiguity can or should be erased. Instead, his essay calls for an end to the abdication of responsibility for moral actions that seemed to pervade the 1970's and 1980's. American letters must remain dedicated to the cause of calling a nation to task rather than wallowing with it in its decadence. According to Clark, the solution must rely on a critical minority "who, for some unknown set of reasons,

continue to argue that human beings are somehow capable of empathy, compassion, and sensitivity, even though cruelty, hostility, and insensitivity, and rationalized dishonesty now dominate."(1) Clark argues that without such a minority who are concerned about moral and ethical values, there will be no hope for man, who will eventually destroy himself through his own barbarity.

Other authorities and authors would seem to agree. Theologian Robert Short, analyzing the presentation of God in comic strips ("Peanuts" and "Pogo") and in recent science fiction movies ("Star Wars" and "E.T.") suggests that much of current literature has been created to fill the aching void in the heart of modern humankind. "Western civilization began believing only in itself and having faith only in its own dreams," says Short. "It became overwhelmingly humanistic. But in getting rid of God, we lost something absolutely essential to our humanity. We lost our understanding of the why in life."(2) Unfortunately, some critics believe that the twentieth century culture has so declined that to reach a majority of citizens, great works of fiction are not sufficient. Instead, film media and artistic media now are necessary means if artists are to touch the souls of the masses. Consequently, moral absolutes, such as "the force" and its "dark side", which appeared in the first movie of the

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(1) Kenneth B. Clark, "The American Dilemma," in The New York Times (Feb. 16, 1975), Sec. E, p.15.

Star Wars trilogy, appear as symbolic representations in science fiction cinema, rather than in "real life" situations. As a result of this new approach, I believe that the call to arms against immorality is more easily ignored since it is presented in almost comic strip form. In fact, the real message of such cinematic efforts may be lost entirely as character and plot (action) overcome the inner message to be conveyed. Although Clark would be exultant that a concerned minority still exists in our era, he most assuredly would be disappointed that its efforts have been forced to the fringe areas or marginalia of the culture. Although I believe that the critical minority is also evident in the main stream of thought, it seems that great writers no longer exert the strong influence they once wielded. Instead, although they continue to call man to account, the lack of sensitive leaders impedes the effectiveness of their call! This occurrence is evidence that true to Calvinistic tenets, the further man moves from the fall, the harder it becomes for him to focus in on a moral center. Instead he finds his essential depravity growing, and it appears that man's denial of moral responsibility still predominates as a majority continues to glory in perversion and to admire craft, greed and other evils which lead to success.(2)

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that man has

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(2)Robert Short quoted by Bruce Buursma in The Chicago Tribune (June 22, 1983) Sec. 2, p.6.

abdicated his responsibility and abandoned his struggle for morality, only presenting the dilemma of moral ambiguity in comics and films. The dilemma has been and continues to be examined in both fictional and non-fictional writing on many different levels. For example, on a higher plane, a similar perception of America is also held by theologian Paul Tillich, evidence that philosophers also have taken up the cause of reawakening a morally dormant America. Tillich suggests that an essential problem for Americans is the understanding of the ultimate paradox of humanity, that the

finite is capable of the infinite and that, in the presence of the infinite, everything finite is confirmed. The struggle between extra-Calvinism, which declares the human and divine natures of Christ are separate and outside each other, and infra-Lutheranism, a belief in the mutual indwelling of both natures, has caused Americans to decide the paradoxical tension by opting for one side or the other or by confirming a general skepticism or split consciousness that makes it impossible to reconcile the conflict constructively.(3)

Tillich's resolution consists of a synthesis of the two opposites. In confronting morality, he affirms the dialectical, combining a yes and a no. Thus, all of life's choices are veiled in ambiguity. Yet Tillich also opposes ethical relativism and asserts that despite paradoxical appearances, there are three absolutes which can be defined, though all of these are on a philosophical rather than practical level. Thus, Tillich acknowledges that even if man

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(3)Paul Tillich, My Search For Absolutes (New York, 1967), p.35.

is willing to accept the theorem of the three absolutes, he will still have to confront his dual nature in his everyday actions. He will see his potential for "good" as well as his inclination to "evil." Moreover, it is inevitable that such confrontations with moral decisions will produce frustration and confusion. And as Flannery O'Connor has stated, "Mysteries are a great embarrassment to the modern mind and the greatest mystery I can think of is the mystery of our position on earth."(4)

However, individuals can cope with such confusion and frustration if they are able to attain a rich realization of the human condition through the writer's pen. For although the recognition of man's duality and the ambiguity of his moral choices are not solutions in themselves, a minority who awakens the moral conscience of America by their works will at least motivate some action. Even if Tillich's absolutes are philosophical, they still place demands on one's life and should counteract the prevailing tendency to deny ethical and moral claims. Hopefully, they will also motivate either a partial return to morality or at least a recognition of its inherent value.

Obviously Clark is not the only writer who recognizes the dual moral heritage of America. As has been noted above, it has been reaffirmed by theologians, writers of fiction and

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(4) Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners (New York, 1957), p. 124.

science fiction, and even by journalists. For example, an editorial written at the time of the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan also mentions the paradox. It reads,

The United States was born out of the violence of conquest, rebellion and civil war.... Its myths are those of the frontier, where the fastest gun was king and every man had his fate in his own hands.

The United States has risen to become a major industrial and military power claiming universality for its values while seeming unable to shake off the darker elements in its tradition.

The roots of the problem lie deep in American society.(5)

In the same vein, other world newspapers also acknowledged the American duality as a paradoxical virtue, yet a vice.

The violence [sic] which runs through the country like the rumbling of distant thunder is the same current which renders America dynamic, vibrant, audacious, but also brutal, dangerous and sometimes bloody... Societies so well policed that violence never cracks the surface are societies so weakened that storm or malady can sweep them away in no time.(6)

Blood has always been a part of its history...a secret violent component of America, which, from time to time, explodes like the hidden crater of a volcano.

If freedom is to remain, then freedom must pay the price.(7)

However, Clark would disagree with individuals who acknowledge duality and ambivalence as positive traits. Instead, he would contend that this moral condition of man must remain in the forefront of the human mind as a

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(5) The London Times as quoted in The Chicago Tribune, April 6, 1981, Section 5, p.4.

(6) Journal de Geneve, Geneva, Switzerland, as quoted in The Chicago Tribune, April 6, 1981, Section 5, p.4.

(7) Corriere della Sera, Milan, Italy as quoted in The Chicago Tribune, April 6, 1981, Section 5, p.4.

frustrating and continuing paradox, not as a condition that receives approval and acceptance because it is a constant. In Clark's opinion, America's increasing failure to recognize the claim of moral actions is a serious flaw, one which needs to be corrected or at least prominently drawn to the attention of society. Although the pull of "evil" on man will never be eliminated and man's dual nature will continue, a realization of man's potential to combat his duality is necessary. Without such a recurring realization, a complete capitulation to amorality and immorality is inevitable. Man cannot deny duality as his inherent condition, but he must also have an awareness that he can act, and act virtuously. In order to attain this, Clark, as was stated previously, felt that the American public must be constantly confronted with the problem by a concerned minority. Indeed, Clark was probably aware that this confrontation had been frequently attempted by many writers in American literature and that its continuity was essential if the human race was to succeed.

I believe that the critical minority spoken of by Clark has been a constant force in American thought, as can be seen in the writing of many authors who are considered America's best. For example, writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne examined the dilemma in his short fiction as well as his novels. As part of the critical minority, he places before his readers characters who confront and struggle with the dilemma. The reader of such Hawthorne stories as "The



Birthmark," "Young Goodman Brown," "The Bosom Serpent," and "The Minister's Black Veil" will immediately be struck with the emphasis on man's dual nature and his frustration with the burden of original sin. Dogmatic solutions that stress absolutes are also rejected by Hawthorne in his most famous novel, The Scarlet Letter, as he notes the variance of morality and immorality in the characters of Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth. Through each of these characters Hawthorne asserts the futility of judging by outward appearance and stresses man's inability to see the inner machinations of another human soul. In addition, Hawthorne shows that negative symbols or absolutes such as the scarlet "A" also possess positive qualities (Angel) as society shifts its opinions.

Another member of the critical minority in the 1800's was Herman Melville, whose white whale, Moby Dick, was fanatically pursued by the satanic Captain Ahab. The second level of meaning in both Moby Dick and the novella Billy Budd illustrates Melville's similar concern with man's inability to distinguish "good" from "evil" and to value a higher power than himself.

However, the real dilemma of moral ambiguity began much earlier than either Hawthorne or Melville. Basically it was the result of early fundamentalist theologians such as Calvin himself, who often dismissed doctrines that were confusing or unable to be explained in human terms as mysteries of God

which had to be accepted by faith. Thus as the Puritan religion evolved, the followers of Calvin found inherent paradoxes in their founder's words and in his explanations of key church doctrines. These paradoxes, such as the association of secular success with spiritual well being, many times combined polar opposites. Thus, as time progressed, the early Puritan desire to establish a god-pleasing and god-fearing Utopia on the American shores was replaced by the desire to develop a powerful nation of monetary success where self-indulgence and self-pride were acceptable. In fact, for many early settlers the two opposing goals were even linked as they rationalized that the end (an outwardly moral and success-filled America) justified the means (immorality, greed, and self-pride) that was used to attain it. Thus when Hawthorne and Melville became the critical minority who called attention to both the paradox and the dilemma caused by it, the problem was already deeply rooted for over a century of America's development.

Indeed, in the early nineteenth century the problem was intensified as Emerson and Thoreau, contemporaries of Hawthorne and Melville, advocated man's independence and encouraged him to concentrate on self-determination and self-assurance rather than to rely on traditional dogma. Instead of seeking God, men were to develop the godhead within themselves. Although Emerson and Thoreau did not deny the claims of morality on mankind, some misinterpretation occurred

as these writers exalted the human spirit and contributed to the confusion about "right" and "wrong" by encouraging their readers not to acknowledge the ambiguity that faced them daily. Rather they advocated man's belief in himself and in his potential and capability for conquering life's mysteries. Men were to revel in their accomplishments, and their flaws were to be absorbed as a positive element in their nature. They were to recognize that the true nature of life was energetic and fluid and that the dogma of the traditional faith was in conflict with the Transcendental law and the general divinity of man. Unfortunately, like Calvin's writings, the printed words of the Transcendentalists soon resulted in confusion and intensified the frustration that man confronted when he dealt with moral choices in his life. As Flannery O'Connor states in Mystery and Manners:

Since the eighteenth century, the popular spirit of each succeeding age has tended more and more to the view that the ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of man, a belief that is still going strong even though this is the first generation to face total extinction because of these advances. (8)

Despite the fact that the Transcendentalists advocated introspection and self-knowledge, the positive traits of moral issues were largely ignored as the belief in man's own potential began to dwarf the importance of an omnipotent Godhead and His absolute. Nevertheless, the darker side of

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(8)O'Connor, p.41.

man was still being examined in the works of Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain and Emily Dickinson, all of who portrayed the tenuous position of man searching for absolutes in a constantly fluctuating society.

As society moved into the early 1900's, it was also evident that the critical minority had not died. It continued to emphasize the importance of recognizing man's morally ambiguous state and to call on readers to be concerned about the dilemma which man faces. Although Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris each drew characters who were caught in the dilemma, perhaps F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels and short stories were the most successful in portraying the consequences of fluctuating morality. Even the moral Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby is momentarily attracted to the glitter and success of the immoral Jay Gatsby before he reasserts the claims of his moral heritage, rejects the amorality of the East, and returns to his birthright in the Midwest. Gatsby himself is also portrayed sympathetically as an individual who has fallen prey to his darker desires for success, yet recognizes the unhappiness inherent in his choice. In Gatsby as well as Tender is the Night, Fitzgerald depicts the emptiness of a world based on self-indulgence, a world which he himself was experiencing in his own private life. As one who had lived with the frustration of a world of interrelated yet contradictory values, Fitzgerald, perhaps unintentionally, focused the attention of his fellow Americans

on the importance of a moral stance and the potential for reform. Characters such as Carraway and Dick Diver are deeply involved in moral quests and are attempting to understand their new self-centered society.

Eventually the thematic emphasis reached the second half of the twentieth century as duality became an evident theme in such modern American writers as John Updike, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, J.D. Salinger, and Robert Penn Warren. (9) For example, in All The Kings' Men Warren portrays Jack Burden initially as becoming increasingly callous and oblivious to morality. As a result of his observation of the people around him like Willie Stark and Tiny Duffy, he has lost the perspective he once had, and has been unwilling to complete his doctoral research for fear of the moral judgments he will be required to make about his ancestors. Like Steinbeck's Ethan Allen Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent, Burden is reluctant to take a moral stance and to acknowledge the fact that the web of life touches all men. Instead, in a modern sense, Jack has succumbed to the Great Sleep, a way of ignoring the deteriorating values around him and not accepting responsibility for the rebirth of a sense of "right" and "wrong" in his society.

Similarly, the works of the other four authors also

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(9) Raymond Griffith, "Dissonant Symphony: Multilevel Duality in the Fiction of John Steinbeck." (Loyola University Chicago), 1972, p.47.

lament the fact that beliefs in absolutes have deteriorated, in Tillich's words, to ethical relativism. Each author illustrates the paradoxical fact that, although individual moral contents are always changing because of time and spatial relationships and the singular concreteness of individual situations where moral decisions are required, moral absolutes still remain, although they cannot be applied dogmatically in all situations. Nevertheless, man's conscience still calls on him to choose "good" over "bad," and to wrestle with his dual condition, rather than to ignore its challenge and capitulate. Most of these authors also concede that their insistence that there is some type of moral code is not a call for "law," to be used for false security or to allow man to be corrupted through imitation and indoctrination. The minority's call for a return to value systems is not an assertion that all decisions can be made simply because right and wrong are obvious. They are not. Rather, a belief in a moral code is essential if American society is to continue to exist. It serves as a necessary curb, mirror and measuring stick that allows man to see inwardly and to combat dualism and ethical relativism. Consequently, although the minority writers sound an alarm, and call the reading public to arms over moral issues, they are not naive enough to expect an actual attainment of perfection. Striving toward it is sufficient. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye is evidence that other modern authors were concerned with fading values and phoniness in

America but were unable to paint dogmatic solutions of absolutes. Instead they were content to expose the dilemma and increase their readers' awareness, hoping that a conscience or an inner sense of moral values would be awakened in reading.

For a majority of these writers, the purpose of fiction was to bring man to a complete realization of his tenuous position as a moral individual in an immoral world. Tillich contends that no moral conscience is an island.(10) If it were, it would be static, not dynamic, monistic, not pluralistic. In fact, Tillich notes that no moral system has ever been completely safe or unquestioned. Instead, many times there is a split conscience where "two different internalizations fight with each other, or in which our courage to dare a new step fights with our bondage to the tradition into which we were indoctrinated."(11)

It is the surrender to such a split conscience that Clark indicts, and he calls America to task, to an avoidance of acceptance and to a realization of the challenge such a divided system presents. Not surprisingly, this dilemma has been explored intellectually as well as in other seminal works of criticism and philosophy (notably R.W.B. Lewis' The American Adam , F.A.O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance, Charles Feidelson, Jr.'s Symbolism in American Literature and

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(10)Tillich, p.99.

(11)Tillich, pp.100-101.

David Bakan's The Duality of Human Existence.) Such a strong continuity suggests that this thematic emphasis will continue to resurface in the future in both mainstream cultural productions as well as in marginalia.

However, as far as modern fiction as goes, I believe that John Steinbeck is certainly among the masters when it comes to analyzing and thoroughly examining the concept of moral ambiguity. In fact, as a result of his preoccupation, Steinbeck, a moral critic who had a strong concern for America and who was part of Clark's critical minority of concerned individuals, at times fell victim to condemnation by others as a simplistic, moralistic and primitive writer, one who could be easily dismissed by the aesthetic elite as a preacher of moral philosophy rather than a true artist. As Ray Griffith has pointed out in his 1972 Loyola dissertation on Steinbeck, Dissonant Symphony, there is multilevel duality in all of Steinbeck's major works, a duality which reflects Steinbeck's awareness of America's essential problem - whether to accept the Puritan heritage of guilt and total depravity as promulgated by Calvin, or to accept the later contention of Emerson and Thoreau, that man was, is, and will remain perfectible if he obtains self-reliance and continues to believe in himself. Griffith asserts that

Steinbeck's duality takes the peculiarly American form of the prolonged abrasion between the expansive philosophy of transcendentalism espoused by Emerson and the limiting doctrines of total natural depravity and predestination inherent in Calvinist Puritanism.(12)



Similarly, Peter Lisca affirms that all of his [Steinbeck's] successful fiction contains a tension between the mind and heart, science and poetry.(13) Lisca here not only associates Steinbeck with Hawthorne, but establishes the fact that logic and emotions, reason and feeling, are at times polar opposites in Steinbeck, but occasionally paradoxically overlap when morality and ethics are being determined.

Steinbeck's work at its best consistently points out the paradox of Puritan doctrine which insists on the total depravity of man and yet equates worldly success as an indication of his godliness and ability to gain approval in God's sight. Thus it is no wonder that the confusion over ethics and morals has spawned over a century of literary concern. The American dream of the early Puritans to create a new Jerusalem, a city of God, had been crippled by a companion dream - a desire for material wealth and monetary success, both of which would have been abhorrent to the early Puritan settlers who set out for the New World with the real moral dream of America as a potential paradise .

Soon, as Steinbeck realized, early Americans who were shaped by the doctrine of total depravity began to be less and less concerned about evil as they attained the goals of success which were equated with the reward of the righteous,

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(12)Griffith, p.48.

(13)Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, (New York, 1978), p.292.

God's elect. Soon success began to be seen as resulting from man's own abilities and efforts rather than from God's gift of abundance. Therefore, since the early Puritans had reached the final goal of worldly success which indicated godliness, the means to attaining it was thought irrelevant. Steinbeck's portrayal of such a duality in his major works is effectively chronicled in Griffith's work. He points out that man is God's perfect creature, but at the same time he is marred by his fall into sin. Unsure of what his true natural tendencies are (depravity or purity), Steinbeck's characters are, as Clark's masses, inclined toward evil but in minorities paradoxically utilize their free will and conscience to choose good. Disappointingly, however, the large majority of these characters remain unaware of the dilemma or the fact that there is a solution to it. Such realization is necessary to affect a change and to move mankind away from the path of self-destruction.

Griffith has wisely pointed out that Steinbeck was truly influenced by religion and his religious heritage, and that duality extends into his best work, but I believe he wrongly concludes that Steinbeck's lesser known works are not as influenced by this dominant theme. Instead Griffith seems to feel that the early work is bleak and pessimistic and that the later writing is part of a revisionist cycle in which Steinbeck merely tries to affix happy endings to his material.(14) However, moral ambiguity pervades all of

Steinbeck's work. In fact, the tensions are evident even in the so-called positive works; for example, even in East of Eden Steinbeck wisely refrains from portraying an absolute of "good" in his ending. It may happen, but then again it may not. As Griffith notes: "In Steinbeck's fiction good may sometimes win a battle, evil may sometimes win a battle, but the victories are usually temporary and the warfare is inevitably ferocious."(15) From the early struggle to create a myth in To a God Unknown and Cup of Gold, to the later positive endings of Sweet Thursday and East of Eden, there is always a sense of uneasiness, of what Lee in East of Eden describes as the good smell of rotten apples (coincidentally the fruit of the fall). This uneasy tension reflects man's dilemma of trying to find the clear cut dichotomy between good and evil, but never completely succeeding in being able to specifically identify, classify, and categorize the two extremes. Rather, he is caught in valleys (East of Eden, To a God Unknown, The Pastures of Heaven) - helplessly surrounded by choices which are gray, rather than black or white. And though Steinbeck, as Agnes Donohue points out, is equally fascinated by depravity as well as innocence,(16) he seems to conclude with Clark that the reality is that man's condition

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(14)Griffith, p.57.

(15)Griffith, p.57.

(16)Agnes Donohue, "The Endless Journey to No End," in A Casebook on the 'Grapes of Wrath', (New York, 1968), pp.257-266.

will always remain in a flux between the extremes, a limbo where intentional good will sometimes produce evil and vice versa.

Yet despite the frustration of living in such a paradoxical world, Steinbeck came to realize, as Clark did, that all moral dilemmas must be countered with hope - hope that succeeding generations can and will break the bonds of tradition and come closer to the original American dream - a new Eden transplanted to foreign soil. Thus, as his early work is compared to his later production, a progression can be seen as Steinbeck came to terms with moral ambiguity and discovered how to deal with it. He did not, as Henry L. Golemba states, become trapped in the literary fallacy trying to prove both opposites true at the same time. Instead he recognized man's plight and developed a more positive way in which to view this so-called entrapment in paradox.

Although Golemba sees Steinbeck's viewpoint as espousing the view that the quest of the human spirit is futile,(17) Steinbeck does not take the stance of capitulation. He does not display a one-sided philosophy of despair(18), or predict the futility of human effort and hopelessness of the future.(19) Instead he acknowledges man's duality, and he

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(17)Henry L. Golemba, "Steinbeck's Attempt to Escape the Literary Fallacy," Modern Fiction Studies, XV (Summer, 1969), p.234.

(18)Golemba, p.239.

(19)Golemba, p.238.

stresses hope in spite of it. In fact, the open-endedness of some of Steinbeck's conclusions indicates his unwillingness to state an absolute. Instead, moral ambiguity became his dominant theme. As Griffith notes,

Mixtures of gray tones are more frequent than stark black and stark white. An additional complication is superimposed with Steinbeck's varying attitudes toward good and evil, resulting in an outlook that is tantamount to dual duality.(20)

In fact, "These two most comprehensive of Steinbeck's themes relate to the nature of man and the universe, this clash between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection."(21)

As Joe Saul says to Mordeen in Steinbeck's "Everyman," Burning Bright, "It is the race of the species that must go staggering on, despite human insanities and evil."(22)

However, though constant repetition reaffirms Steinbeck's fascination with moral ambiguity, no criticism to this point has acknowledged the effect or the power of this thematic emphasis as a major concern of the author. A further slight is the failure of most Steinbeck critics to trace the development of moral ambiguity in the earlier short stories and novellas and its progression through Steinbeck's career. Although passing references have been made in analyzing his so-called masterpieces, Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice And Men, Tortilla Flat, and In Dubious Battle, (23) it is the

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(20)Griffith, p.22.

(21)Griffith, p.28.

(22)John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, (New York, 1950), pp.110-111.

contention of this dissertation that man's duality, as well as the ambiguity of his moral and ethical decisions, is not only a prominent message of Steinbeck's major fiction, but that it permeates his entire canon. However, in the works which have been ignored, underestimated and misinterpreted, this central thematic concern also serves as a key to unlocking a rich storehouse of Steinbeckian wisdom, which has until now been largely misunderstood, untapped, or stored away.

In fact, all of Steinbeck's works are in some way concerned with man's moral and ethical decisions, and there is a definite progression from the earliest productions to the later writing. I believe that Steinbeck moves from an essentially deterministic and pessimistic point of view in The Pastures of Heaven to a progressively more positive and hopeful stance in The Long Valley and The Pearl, where men at least reach some understanding of their moral dilemma and find redemption through that understanding. Steinbeck then progresses to an even more positive assertion in East of Eden where self-knowledge brings action and change, but the final novel, Winter of Our Discontent, returns the reader to the tenuous balance of the early work where man overcomes and asserts "good" occasionally but also participates in evil and is subject to recurrent falls into sin. Since the Steinbeck canon is so large, this dissertation will limit its concerns

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(23) See Watt, pp.12-13; Fontenrose, p.140; Donohue, pp.258-259; and Ross, p.438.

to five of Steinbeck's works which have received controversial or mixed reactions due to the failure of most of the critical reviewers to examine the importance of the theme of moral ambiguity. Early works of short fiction such as The Pastures of Heaven, The Long Valley, and a transitional product, The Pearl, and the later novels East of Eden and The Winter of Our Discontent, have certainly received less attention than Steinbeck's acclaimed "masterpieces," Of Mice and Men, Grapes of Wrath, and In Dubious Battle. In fact, despite recent analyses which have called Steinbeck one of our greatest and best-loved authors, the five books previously mentioned have mistakenly been labeled as inferior or minor productions and have not received adequate consideration by serious critics.

But before these fictional works themselves are examined, there is yet further evidence which bolsters this dissertation's contention about moral ambiguity as a dominant concern of Steinbeck as an individual. For example, Steinbeck's non-fictional productions, letters, journals, and log, all give strong indications of his fascination with the ultimate moral question. Similarly, as I have noted, Steinbeck's so-called major works undoubtedly offer solid proof of his fascination with moral ambiguity. For example, Doc Burton in Steinbeck's first successful novel, In Dubious Battle, states:

Listen to me, Mac. My senses aren't above reproach, but they're all I have. I want to see the whole picture--as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of

"good" and "bad", and limit my vision. If I used the term "good" on a thing I'd lose my license to inspect it, because there might be bad in it. Don't you see? I want to be able to look at the whole thing.(24)

In a similar vein is Jim Casy's assertion in Grapes of Wrath, "There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing."(25) Both passages assert there is no causation involved with man's action, but the very fact that one has to assert that there is no causation emphasizes the reality of man's dilemma when making moral judgments. While presenting the problem of considering moral absolutes as laws, both passages call attention to the fact that man still must confront a world of "moral" choices, despite his wish to deny the claims of morality on his actions.

Finally, the careful reader of Steinbeck will also recall the speech of the narrator in Tortilla Flat, who states,

It is astounding to find that the belly of every black and evil thing is as white as snow. And it is saddening to discover how the concealed parts of angels are leprous. Honor and peace to Pilon, for he had discovered how to uncover and to disclose to the world the good that lay in every evil thing. Nor was he blind, as so many saints are, to the evil of good things.(26)

Later in the same novel, Danny reiterates the earlier observation by the narrator.

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(24)John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, (New York, 1936), p.130.

(25)John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, (New York, 1939), p.23.

(26)John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, (New York, 1935), p.45.



"My father was not a very good man, but he sometimes saw saints, and sometimes he saw bad things. It depended on whether he was good or bad when he saw them" (Tortilla Flat, p.99).

Finally, there are echoes of Steinbeck's preoccupation in Of Mice and Men. Crooks says, [Most guys] "got nothing to tell him...what's so an' what ain't so. Maybe if he sees somethin', he don't know whether it's right or not. He can't turn to some other guy and ast him if he sees it too."(27)

Steinbeck even noted his concern in his 1961 Nobel acceptance speech when he acknowledged his strong belief that authors have a moral obligation to their readers. In the speech, Steinbeck defines the high duties and responsibilities of the makers of literature. "They are not to be pale and emasculated nor prideful and conceited. They are not separate and exclusive, for their function, their duty, their responsibilities, have been decreed by mankind." He also mentions the present plight of mankind, as he notes that, at this time, "Humanity has been passing through a grey and desolate time of confusion."(28)

Referring to Faulkner's famous Nobel acceptance speech given only 12 years before, Steinbeck also alludes to Faulkner's comment that only the human heart in conflict with itself seems worth writing about. Steinbeck's reaction is

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(27)John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, (New York, 1937), p.71.  
 (28)John Steinbeck, "Nobel Acceptance Speech," quoted in Donohue, A Casebook on 'The Grapes of Wrath,' (New York, 1968), pp.294-295.

agreement.

This is not new. The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams, for the purpose of improvement.(29)

Furthermore, Steinbeck's speech also declares the moral culpability of any writer who refuses to acknowledge his responsibility to his race. He says,

the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit--for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love... I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature.(30)

Later in the text, Steinbeck is bold enough to suggest that perhaps even Nobel himself was exercising a moral challenge by funding the awards. Assessing Nobel's own discoveries, Steinbeck notes that

He perfected the release of explosive forces capable of creative good or of destructive evil, but lacking choice, ungoverned by conscience or judgment.

Nobel saw some of the cruel and bloody misuses of his inventions. He may even have foreseen the end result of his probing--access to ultimate violence, to final destruction.(31)

Yet although Nobel's natural reaction should have been cynicism and despair that all he intended for good had been perverted, Steinbeck continued his acceptance speech by hinting that perhaps Nobel established the trust as a safety valve to stimulate the human mind and spirit, to provide

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(29)Nobel Acceptance Speech, p.295.

(30)Nobel Acceptance Speech, p.295.

(31)Nobel Acceptance Speech, p.295.

conscience and judgment, to reward and restore greatness and goodness.

In the final two paragraphs of the speech, Steinbeck attempts to define what he considers man's dilemma.

We have usurped many of the powers we once ascribed to God. Fearful and unprepared, we have assumed lordship over the life and death of the whole world, of all living things. The danger and the glory and the choice rest finally in man. The test of his perfectibility is at hand.

Having taken God-like power, we must seek ourselves for the responsibility and the wisdom we once prayed some deity might have. Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope. So that today, Saint John the Apostle may well be paraphrased: In the end is the word, and the word is man, and the word is with man.(32)

Besides the evidence provided at the Nobel ceremonies, more proof of Steinbeck's interest in man's duality and the ambiguity of his moral actions can be found in his non-fictional work, The Log from The Sea of Cortez, and its accompanying preface. The Log is primarily a narrative account of a biological expedition undertaken in 1941 by Steinbeck and his close friend, Ed Ricketts. Though many of its details deal with research accomplished during the travel, there are philosophical speculations which are drawn from observations of nature and which reflect Steinbeck's attempts to see man's plight as a continuation and extension of the dilemmas of his fallen post-Edenic nature.

Even Steinbeck's prologue to the Log, entitled "About Ed

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(32) Nobel Acceptance Speech, p.296.

Ricketts," which was added to the book after Ricketts' untimely death in 1948, indicates that Steinbeck's philosophical observations in the Log about the duality of man and nature were also related to observations he made about his own good friend. The paradoxical description of Ricketts begins the author's portrayal of fallen man. According to Steinbeck, Ricketts was an anomaly - a mixture of opposites. Steinbeck says,

Nearly everyone who knew him has tried to define him. Such things were said of him as, "He was half-Christ and half-goat." He was a great teacher and great lecher--an immortal who loved women. Surely he was an original and his character was unique, but in such a way that everyone was related to him, one in this way and another in some different way. He was gentle but capable of ferocity, small and slight but strong as an ox, loyal and yet untrustworthy, generous but gave little and received much. His thinking was as paradoxical as his life. He thought in mystical terms and hated and distrusted mysticism. He was an individualist who studied colonial animals with satisfaction.(33)

Eventually Ricketts became Steinbeck's archetype for all men. "He was different from anyone and yet so like everyone that everyone found himself in Ed" (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, xiii). In fact, Steinbeck himself even found a good deal of the raw source material for his fiction from events in Ricketts' life. According to Steinbeck, the short story The Snake, and the novels Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday all came from real incidents in Ricketts' life. In fact, Ricketts'

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(33)John Steinbeck, The Log from The Sea of Cortez, (New York, 1969), x-xi. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parentheses within the text of this paper.

observation that the madame of the Monterey whorehouse was better than "respected" citizens and that he wished "good people could be as good" reinforced Steinbeck's own perception of the strange mixture of good and evil he himself had perceived in mankind.

The Log reveals that Ricketts' cultural tastes also influenced Steinbeck and reaffirmed his belief that ambiguity and paradoxical opposites were a key part of human life. For example, Ricketts' favorite work of literature was Faust, which portrays the German hero's constant struggle with morality and concentrates on his eventual decision to sell his own soul. Similarly, musically, Ricketts was entranced by Bach's "The Art of the Fugue," a work which delineated the fine art of creating a tune through parallel-repeating passages. In Steinbeck's mind, "The Art of the Fugue" reflected a parallel human state in which opposites war against each other but only succeed in creating a standoff. The contrapuntal melodies are paradoxical since they produce harmony and beauty from potentially unharmonic notes.

As a result of his cultural interests and fascinations, Ricketts worked to "break through" philosophically as it seemed these artists had. As Steinbeck says, Ricketts struggled with this concept "of coming out through the back of the mirror into some kind of reality which would make the day world dreamlike" (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, li).

In addition, Ricketts' biological observations as a

laboratory technician also reinforced Steinbeck's belief in the importance of duality. In the Preface, Steinbeck cites Ricketts' observances that the rattlesnake and the kangaroo rat

were the greatest of enemies since the snake hunts and feeds on the rat. But in a larger sense they must be the best of friends. The rat feeds the snake and the snake selects out the slow and weak and generally thins the rat people so that both species can survive (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, lii).

Such a paradox fascinated Ricketts as a scientist perhaps because it was true yet incomprehensible. Ironically, Steinbeck eventually observed that the same paradoxes were evident in Ricketts' personal life as well.

He loved nice things and did not care about them. He loved to bathe and yet when the water heater in the laboratory broke down he bathed in cold water for over a year before he got around to having it fixed... He liked comfort and the chairs in the lab were stiff and miserable (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, lv).

Thus the fact that something could be simultaneously good or bad was true for humans as well as animals.

Yet these paradoxes mentioned above are minor compared to Steinbeck's analysis of Ricketts' major problem. He felt that Ricketts struggled constantly between self-contempt and liking himself. In this struggle, he became a symbol for mankind, fluctuating between despising his sinful nature and believing he could overcome it with positive determination.

As Steinbeck says:

Once Ed was able to like himself he was released from the secret prison of self-contempt. Then he did not have to prove superiority any more by any of the ordinary methods,

including giving. He could receive and understand and be truly glad, not competitively glad (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, lxiii).

From his close observation and interaction with his friends, Steinbeck seems to have concluded that Ed's trials within himself were universal and that controlling this duality rather than being controlled by it was the key to the improvement of mankind. As Steinbeck says at the end of "About Ed Ricketts,"

I wish we could all be so. If we could learn even a little to like ourselves, maybe our cruelties and anger might melt away. Maybe we would not have to hurt one another just to keep our ego-chins above water (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, lxiv).

Appropriately, the text of the log itself also reinforces the vastness of the ambiguity which faces mankind. In addition, it reaffirms the fact that understanding and accepting this ambiguity is necessary to man's ultimate redemption from the power of original sin. The analysis of tide pools and the observations performed on Ricketts' rented boat, "The Western Flyer," indicated that lower forms of nature mirror its higher species in its paradoxical existence. The voyage seemed to reinforce Steinbeck's belief that every act is ambiguous, neither "good" or "bad," and that the supreme frustration of man is that absolutes seem nonexistent. As Steinbeck says, "What we have wanted always is an unchangeable, and we have found that only a compass point, a thought, an individual ideal, does not change" (The Log From the Sea of Cortez, p.37).

In any case, the voyage helped Steinbeck to develop and refine an approach to life (non-teleological thinking) which has been much discussed by critics. This theory denies the value of causal thinking and asserts that things just are. For Steinbeck at this point in his life, any teleology implied an absolute. A teleology seemed set in iron as an explanation while Steinbeck and Ricketts in the voyage observed the unpredictability of both tide pools and stars. After the trip they both concluded that they could only trust one thing - that everything was in a constant state of flux. To say that man was moving from a "present bad condition to a future better one" implied that the fine balance of opposites would someday be overcome. And, unfortunately, the evidence of man's history indicated just the opposite: that man's postlapsarian condition would continue to influence generation after generation and that mankind would remain trapped in his duality, frustrated by his constant struggle to choose between good/evil.

Man grows toward perfection; animals grow toward man; bad grows toward good; and down toward up, until our little mechanism, hope, achieved in ourselves probably to cushion the shock of thought, manages to warp our whole world (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, pp.88-89).

As a result of the voyage, Steinbeck apparently felt that man's progress was ironically leading to his extinction, but despite the "evil reality," he still retained his optimism. Though Pandora's box had released a plethora of evil, for Steinbeck hope still remained and influenced as well



as buoyed him us as a writer.

For in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the trait of hope still controls the future, and man, not a species, but a triumphant race, will approach perfection, and finally, tearing himself free, will march up the stars and take his place where, because of his power and virtue, he belongs: on the right hand of the x -1. From which majestic seat he will direct with pure intelligence the ordering of the universe (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.91).

Steinbeck further defines the moral dilemma of man on pages 97-98 of the Log. Here, too, he stresses man's ambivalence by pointing out that

There is a strange duality in the human which makes for an ethical paradox. We have definitions of good qualities and of bad; not changing things, but generally considered good and bad throughout the ages and throughout the species.... yet in our structure of society, the so-called and considered good qualities are invariable concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are the cornerstones of success. A man--a viewing-point man--while he will love the abstract good qualities and detest the abstract bad, will nevertheless envy and admire the person who through possessing the bad qualities has succeeded economically and socially, and will hold in contempt that person whose good qualities have caused failure (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, pp.97-98).

Steinbeck concludes, "Perhaps no other animal is so torn between alternatives. Man might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.98). Yet despite his definitions, Steinbeck also recognized that despite the futility of such an endeavor, man would ironically continue in his search for absolutes.

We search for something that will seem like truth to us; we search for understanding; we search for that principle which keys us deeply into the pattern of all life; we search for the relations of things, one to another (The

Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.112).

However, according to Steinbeck, the flaw in teleological thinking (finding causes and cures) was that it considers what "should be" in the terms of an end pattern and presumes the bettering of conditions, not understanding that at best only a superficial and inconsequential shift has been made and even that may not create a "positive" improvement. (See The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.138.) On the other hand, non-teleological thinking

concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually "is"--attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.139).

As the log continues, Steinbeck notes that even when individuals ask "why," they usually receive relational answers instead of definitive ones. Nevertheless, through man's search for the "truth," through wishful thinking, the relative answer becomes dogma, "since everyone continually searches for absolutisms (hence the value placed on diamonds, the most permanent physical things in the world) and imagines continually that he finds them" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.145).

According to Steinbeck, however, the relational should be regarded "only as a glimpse--a challenge to consider also the rest of the relations as they are available--to envision the whole picture as well as can be done with given abilities and data" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.145). If this is

not done, a closed mind results as individuals believe and profess apparent answers and block possible opposite "answers" which might otherwise be unearthed by honest efforts. These potential but unrealized solutions would "if faced realistically, give rise to a struggle and to a possible rebirth which might place the whole problem in a new and more significant light" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.146).

In short, Steinbeck saw his purpose as a writer as follows: He was to present things as they happened and let the reader sense for himself their relatedness and meaning. By noting contrary and opposite views, he hoped to make the reading public aware of and willing to chance ruthless-appearing notions. Stereotypes and absolutes would no longer be seen as rigid and set in stone. Rather, his non-causal viewpoint was to provide "the new thing," a "Hegelian 'Christ-child' which arises emergently from the union of two opposing viewpoints," (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.151). Although non-teleological thinkers will "run into the brick wall of the impossibility of perfection while at the same time insisting on the validity of perfection" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.153), as a result of this "breaking through," they will also be forced to deny the grip of role patterns and intellectual training. By accepting "is thinking," Steinbeck hoped that mankind would eventually be able to accept the existence of all anomalies. In addition, he hoped men would also sense that, even though it is still

true that "all [anomalies] are solvable in the sense that any one is understandable, [it is also true] that one leads with the power n to still more and deeper anomalies" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.153).

For Steinbeck, seeing the whole meant that mankind must accept opposites, duality and moral ambiguity and learn to cope with them. The whole contains both fact and fancy, both body and psyche, both physical fact and spiritual truth. Moreover, the polar opposites individual and collective, life and death, macrocosm and microcosm, conscious and unconscious, subject and object, are also simultaneously present in every man's daily life. (See The Log from The Sea of Cortez, pp.153-154). Yet this acceptance of duality was not without its dangers, since an immersion in paradoxical opposites may cause dilemmas which are hard to understand, much less to solve. Steinbeck felt that it would be especially difficult for mankind to tear down established "good" hypotheses. "It is then like a finished sonnet or a painting completed. One hates to disturb it. Even if subsequent information would shoot a hole in it, one hates to tear it down because it once was beautiful and whole" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.182). Yet non-teleological thinking insists that man always be ready to abandon accepted beliefs should new evidence be presented to him.

However, Steinbeck was not so naive as to think that the majority would accept his belief in such a philosophical

enigma. By observing the cheating which took place in the shrimp industry of Mexico and correlating it with man's sinful nature, Steinbeck contended that man possessed an inherent corrupting influence which would continue to affect his sense of reason. Thus, despite his self-determination, man will not always feel that he is in control of himself; instead, outside forces may seem to be controlling, and man will lay the blame for "bad" on these outside forces. He will fail to see that "due to some overlying expediency, some pure or decaying quality, the product of these good units [may be] vicious, sometimes stupid, sometimes inept, and never as good as the men who make it" (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.253).

Besides The Log from The Sea of Cortez, selections from Steinbeck's letters also indicate his awareness of the dilemma of man's duality. Since this thematic emphasis can be observed as a topic of correspondence over a lengthy period of time, there is no doubt the topic certainly had significant meaning for Steinbeck. The following quotations indicate a far-reaching concern that spans several decades.

One of the first references to the topic of duality made by Steinbeck is in a letter to George Albee written on February 25, 1934. Here Steinbeck indicates to his friend that he did not wish his work to be translated into absolute messages.

I think you got out of the murder story about what I wanted you to. You got no character. I didn't want any there. You got color and a dream like movement. I was

writing it more as a dream than as anything else, so if you got this vague and curiously moving feeling out of it that is all I ask. I shall be interested to know what you think of the story, "The Chrysanthemums." It is entirely different and is designed to strike without the reader's knowledge. I mean he reads it casually and after it is finished feels that something profound has happened to him although he does not know what nor how.(34)

In this early correspondence, Steinbeck advocates a feeling of dismay for a reader of his fiction because he realized that his work did not provide the pat answers so many "literary" critics seemed to desire. However, he firmly believed that writers of absolutes had very little flexibility and depth and were unable to produce what Flannery O'Connor called "the anagogical vision .... the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation."(35) Therefore, Steinbeck relied on his readers to interpret and understand the feelings, while adding their own perspective. They were to interpret based on what they brought to the story.

In a later letter to Mavis Macintosh (April, 1935), Steinbeck also described the theory of absolutes as it applied to politics. He wrote:

That is the trouble with the damned people of both sides. They postulate either an ideal communist or a thoroughly damnable communist, and neither side is willing to suspect that the communist is a human, subject to the weaknesses

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(34)John Steinbeck, A Life in Letters, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, (New York, 1975), p.91. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parentheses within the text of this paper.

(35)O'Connor, p.72.

of humans and to the greatneses of humans (A Life in Letters, p.108).

In addition, when writing to the MacIntosh/Otis staff in April, 1940, he noted that his obsession with man's dual nature had expanded and that he was very sensitive to its tendency in close friends. In fact, he mentions how closely it affects even his closest companion. Describing the reaction of his wife to a drunken party during their voyage on the Western Flyer, he stated, "Toward the end Carol and an Indian girl were mingling tears at the incredible beauty and terror of life" (A Life in Letters, p.201). The reaction of the women is, of course, paradoxical, both positive and negative at the same time.

Eventually these early perceptions about duality and man's ambiguous moral sense were refined by Steinbeck and expressed in a theory about mankind which he recorded in a letter to his close friend, Pascal Covici, in January, 1941.

All the goodness and the heroisms [of mankind] will rise up again, then be cut down again and rise up. It isn't that the evil thing wins--it never will--but that it doesn't die. I don't know why we should expect it to. It seems fairly obvious that two sides of a mirror are required before one has a mirror, that two forces are necessary in man before he is man. I asked Paul de Kruif once if he would like to cure all disease and he said yes. Then I suggested that the man he loved and wanted to cure was a product of all his filth and disease and meanness, his hunger and cruelty. Cure those and you would have not man but an entirely new species you wouldn't recognize and probably wouldn't like (A Life in Letters, p.221).

Here Steinbeck acknowledges that perhaps duality is an essential to man, and he seeks not an obliteration of its

existence but rather an acknowledgement of its presence. Only with such a realization will man be able to cope with the paradoxes he will face in daily life.

Yet such a recognition was by no means expected by Steinbeck in normal individuals. Instead, he recognized that most men would retain a belief in child-like naivete, and insist that absolutes do indeed exist. In addition, they would continue to deny the frustrations which were caused by daily encounters with duality and with paradoxical situations. Indeed, Steinbeck realized that even he was not exempt from such an escape route. In fact, he acknowledges that such a primitive attitude existed in his early childhood. Recognizing his own childhood tendency to deal in absolutes and to reject the frustration of believing that opposites can be true at the same time, Steinbeck says in a letter to his friend, Bo Beskow,

I can remember desolating sadnesses when I was a child, worse probably than I have ever had since, because they came out of a black void and there was no reason for them that I could see. Things that were black were black indeed and things that were white were blinding. I do not believe now that the world is going to be destroyed by bombs or ideologies of any kind. The world has always been in process of decay and birth (A Life in Letters, p.345).

In short, Steinbeck as an adult eventually was able to reject the black/white picture of mankind that he possessed as a child. He found it healthier to come to terms with the fact that both positives and negatives exist at all times even though such duality might be exasperating. When he lost track



of his insight about duality, his close friends reminded him of his intuitive discoveries. For example Pascal Covici wrote to encourage a despairing Steinbeck (October 25, 1948),

We are neither free nor slaves. We are both. We do make choices of course, but don't they depend partly on our dispositions and partly on our imminent needs?(36)

Later Covici wrote comparing Steinbeck to Goethe, the German philosopher because

"The mature Goethe, who has achieved inner balance after a hard struggle, was in very decisive opposition to everything diseased, decadent, nihilistic and pessimistic. He avoided it as though it were a plague. The great secret of his personality was the capacity to array the elements of life, strength and fertility, against the destructive forces in his own psyche and in his environment and so always to maintain inner harmony. So he conquered time with eternity and personal fate with the idea of necessity, accepting reality and not letting himself be tricked by any illusions. He lived in reality, and for him reality was the whole, not only the 'difficult' present, but the whole creation."(37)

Yet the dilemma of duality remained a constant for Steinbeck despite his intuition and the reassurances of others. The fact that the whole of life involves contradictions and paradoxes puzzled him and left him even more fascinated with ambiguity and duality. While traveling in Spain, he replied to his close friend, Covici, that it was a completely contradictory country, and that everything a person says or sees or thinks is cancelled out by something else he sees. He found it almost impossible to make

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(36) Thomas Fensch, Steinbeck and Covici: The Story of a Friendship, (Middlebury, VT., 1979), p.85.

(37) Fensch, p.118.

generalities and yet difficult to write a piece without thinking one way or another. He concluded that even in Spain, paradoxes were verities and that the best way to communicate paradox was to set it down as it happened and let the reader's sense of seeing it grow out of the material, just as it grew out of his own [Steinbeck's] seeing. (See A Life in Letters, p.444.) As frustration and fascination about the topic merged, Steinbeck also became more aware that his vision of duality was central in his writing and was worthy of repetition. In fact, in a letter to Carlton A. Sheffield, he acknowledges that he only had a little to say and that by saying it over and over again, it appeared as though it was a design. He also confessed his confusion about his message as well as his realization that it was uncomplicated and not new. (See A Life in Letters, pp.474-475). Although Steinbeck was satisfied by the realization of his theme and the importance of his message, his repetition and emphasis on duality also worried him. He began to wonder about how his style was affecting his production. Contemplating this as a possible flaw, he wrote his agent, Elizabeth Otis, on September 17, 1954,

I have only just arrived at a sense of horror about this technique. If I think of a story, it is bound automatically to fall into my own personal long struggle for technique. But the penalty is terrible. The tail of the kite is designed to hold it steady in the air but it also prevents versatility in the kite and in many cases drags it to the earth. Having a technique, is it not possible that the technique not only dictates how a story is to be written but also what story is to be written? In

other words, style or technique may be a straitjacket which is the destroyer of a writer. It does seem to be true that when it becomes easy to write the writing is not likely to be any good. Facility can be the greatest danger in the world. But is there any alternative? Suppose I want to change my themes and my approach. Will not my technique, which has become almost unconscious, warp and drag me around to the old attitudes and subtly force the new work to be the old? (A Life in Letters, p.497)

Obviously, despite his apparent conviction of the worth of his message, his own duality made him question the effectiveness of repetition, of restating in new words the recurring theme of man's moral dilemma. Yet in his letter to Peter Benchley, an aspiring writer himself, Steinbeck surprisingly seems to retract his previous comments to Otis when he states that the dilemma of most authors is the insecurity of not knowing how or what to communicate. Of course that dilemma is solved when the writer frees himself and acknowledges that all stories are essentially the same.

A writer out of loneliness is trying to communicate like a distant star sending signals. He isn't telling or teaching or ordering. Rather he seeks to establish a relationship of meaning, of feeling, of observing. We are lonesome animals. We spend all life trying to be less lonesome. One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say--and to feel...Of course a writer rearranges life, shortens time intervals, sharpens events, and devises beginnings, middles and ends and this is arbitrary because there are no beginnings nor any ends. We do have curtains--in a day, morning, noon and night, in a man's birth, growth and death. These are curtain rise and curtain fall, but the story goes on and nothing finishes (A Life in Letters, p.523).

While this progression of correspondence covering over twenty years is significant, especially of interest are those letters which were published in connection with the printing

of Steinbeck's translation of The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights. Malory's Morte d'Arthur was, according to Steinbeck, the most formative book of his youth and may also have been a significant milestone in his perception of human duality. When Steinbeck decided in 1956 to attempt to update Malory for a new generation, he recognized the need for careful scholarship. With the aid of such distinguished scholars as Dr. Eugene Vinaver of the University of Manchester, Steinbeck acquired access to the Winchester Manuscripts of Malory in an attempt to assure the accuracy of his work. Not surprisingly, however, Steinbeck's "translation" turned into his own rendering of the tale, and the resulting story was implemented with many of his own ideas and edited and condensed from the original.

Although Steinbeck never completed the whole of Malory, the work was published posthumously by his wife, Elaine Steinbeck, in 1976, and was edited by his close friend, Chase Horton. Especially revealing is the appendix to the work which reprints many of Steinbeck's letters to his editor, Horton, and to his literary agent, Elizabeth Otis. In these letters, some of which are not found in Steinbeck's A Life in Letters, Steinbeck delineates why the Arthurian saga held so great a spell over him. Once again it is the fact that the Arthur tale includes so many paradoxes and that Malory was so successful in his portrayal of man's duality.

His analysis of why Malory appeals to him follows:

A novelist not only puts down a story but he is a story. He is each one of the characters in a greater or a less degree and because he is usually a moral man in intention and honest in his approach, he sets things down as truly as he can. He is limited by his experience, his knowledge, his observation and his feelings.

A novel may be said to be the man who writes it. Now it is nearly always true that a novelist, perhaps unconsciously, identifies himself with one chief or central character in his novel. Into this character he puts not what he thinks he is, but what he hopes to be. We can call this spokesman the self-character.... Now it seems to me that Malory's self-character would be Launcelot. All of the perfections he knew went into this character, all of the things of which he thought himself capable. But, being an honest man he found faults in himself, faults of vanity, faults of violence, faults even of disloyalty and these would naturally find their way into his dream character.

And now we come to *The Grail*, the Quest. I think it is true that any man, novelist or not, when he comes to maturity has a very deep sense that he will not win the Quest. He knows his failings, his shortcomings and particularly his memories of sins, sins of cruelty, of thoughtlessness, of disloyalty, of adultery, and these will not permit him to win the Grail. And so his self-character must suffer the same terrible sense of failure as his author. Launcelot could not see the Grail because of his faults and the sins of Malory himself. He knows he has fallen short and all his excellences, his courage, his courtesy, in his own mind cannot balance his vices and errors, his stupidities.

I think this happens to every man who has ever lived, but it is set down largely by novelists. But there is an answer ready to hand for every man and for novelists. The self-character cannot win the Quest, but his son can, his spotless son, the son of his seed and his blood who has his virtues but has not his faults. And so Galahad is able to win the Quest, the dear son, the unsoiled son, and because he is the seed of Launcelot and the seed of Malory, Malory-Launcelot has in a sense won the Quest and in his issue broken through to the glory which his own faults have forbidden him.(38)

Essentially, then, Malory's writing was appreciated by Steinbeck not only because it depicted the duality of man

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(38) John Steinbeck, *The Acts of Arthur and His Noble Knights*, (New York, 1976), pp.363-365.

which Steinbeck found true but because it also incorporated the boundless hope of mankind which for Steinbeck came to be essential to the eventual success of humanity.

Steinbeck even felt that the story line itself was inherent in most modern English literature. No doubt he would have also concurred with Robert Short's analysis that moral actions and their mirror opposites are often a repeating theme in modern fiction.(39) In fact, Steinbeck felt that Malory's work was a constant that deserved to be reborn in a modern translation. As he states,

The myth of King Arthur continues even into the present day and is an inherent part of the so-called "Western" with which television is filled at the present time--same characters, same methods, same stories, only slightly different weapons and certainly a different topography. The application with the present is very close, and also the present day with its uncertainties very closely parallels the uncertainties of the 15th century (The Acts of King Arthur, p.377).

Steinbeck's perception here is accurate. Like Luke Skywalker of the modern day "Star Wars," Malory's King Arthur is infallible by definition and yet he still makes mistakes and even commits crimes.(40) Yet his fallible nature in no way detracts or makes him less admirable. As Steinbeck wrote to Elizabeth Otis and Chase Horton:

Malory lived in as rough and ruthless and corrupt an age as the world has ever produced. In the Morte he in no way minimizes these things, the cruelty and lust, and murder

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(39) See Short as quoted by Buursma in The Chicago Tribune (June 22, 1983), Sec. 2, p.6.

(40) See The Acts of King Arthur, p.390.

and child-like self-interest. They are all here. But he does not let them put out the sun. Side by side with them are generosity and courage and greatness and the huge sadness of tragedy rather than the little meanness of frustration. (Acts of King Arthur, p. 411)

For Steinbeck it was Malory's ability to portray both sides of man's dual nature that raised his stature as an author.

For no matter how brilliantly one part of life is painted, if the sun goes out, that man has not seen the whole world. Day and night both exist. To ignore the one or the other is to split time in two and to choose one like the short stick in a match game. (The Acts of King Arthur, p. 411)

Any writer who ignores duality and presents absolutes in his work is just as futile as the teleological thinker. He is half a man and half a writer while Malory is a whole. As Steinbeck said, "He [Malory] creates an Arthur who meets his fate, fights against it and accepts it all at once." (The Acts of King Arthur, p.411) Even as the non-teleological thinker glories in the openness of his mind so the writer or artist should, like Malory, "be open on all sides to every kind of light and darkness. But our age almost purposely closes all windows, draws all shades and then later screams to a psychiatrist for light" (The Acts of King Arthur, pp.411-412).

Steinbeck's letter to Elia Kazan reaffirms his view that to break through one needs to reject absolutes and rely on openness.

Externality is a mirror that reflects back to our mind the world our mind has created of the raw materials. But a mirror is a piece of silvered glass. There is a back to it. If you scratch off the silvering, you can see through

the mirror to the other worlds on the other side. I know that many people do not want to break through. I do, passionately, hungrily. I think you do also.

Lift up your mind to the hills, Gadg. Criticize nothing, evaluate nothing. Just let the Thing come thundering in - accept and enjoy. It will be chaos for a while but gradually order will appear and an order that you did not know. No one survives in other people more than two weeks after his death unless he leaves something he has much more lasting than himself (A Life in Letters, pp.626-627).

As this letter indicates, despite the lack of understanding of paradox and duality that he had encountered among early readers of his work, Steinbeck continued to be fascinated by the dilemma it posed, especially in the actions of Arthur. As he wrote to Otis and Horton he describes Arthur as being "like Christ, both hero and fool; in reality he is unbelievable, but as myth and legend, he transcends reality and evokes positive reader response." (A Life in Letters, p.633). Steinbeck even discovered that Malory's so-called flaws were not so damning as he first thought. Although he found what he considered "a great deal of errant nonsense" in a great deal of the material, he told Horton that much of human activity is unreasonable and there is no escaping that fact. Ironically, however, at times the nonsense of humanity turns out to be "like the gas and drug revelations of the Pythoness at Delphi which only makes sense after the fact." (The Acts of King Arthur, p.428.) Later on in a letter to Elizabeth Otis he notes again, "Arthur is a dope," but shortly thereafter, he equates his heroic acts with those of Job. He concludes,

It almost seems that dopiness is required in literature.



Only the bad guys can be smart. Could it be that there is built-in hatred and fear of intelligence in the species so that heroes must be stupid? Cleverness equates with evil almost invariably. Is a puzzlement but there it is (The Acts of King Arthur, p.430).

In fact, eventually Steinbeck realized that

The Arthurian cycle and practically all lasting and deep-seated folklore is a mixture of profundity and childish nonsense. If you keep the profundity and throw out the nonsense, some essence is lost. These are dream stories, fixed and universal dreams, and they have the inconsistency of dreams (The Acts of King Arthur, p.432).

Steinbeck felt that such a work as Malory's required a fine balance, just as paradoxical as that which man must maintain in the face of his dual nature. Lancelot especially became Steinbeck's self character. As he writes to Elizabeth Otis about completing the first half of the Lancelot episode, he states, "Launcelot has not yet had to face his dual self. He is morally untested. That's why I love Launcelot, I guess. He is tested, he fails the test, and still remains noble" (The Acts of King Arthur, p.437).

Yet despite his extreme dedication and interest in the topic, the work began to flounder largely because of Steinbeck's doubt about how to present it - as a period piece or as a thing present and now. Not surprisingly, his goal was to combine the two; to eliminate a period piece where dilemmas are "their dilemmas" and rather to present human problems of the "now." As he says to Elizabeth Otis and Horton, "by setting it against a huge, timeless, almost formal curtain of the 'before,' I hope to make it doubly true of the 'now'" (The

Acts of King Arthur, p.442).

Although he was eventually discouraged by his output and abandoned the translation, the correspondence certainly indicates Steinbeck's preoccupation with man's morals. Steinbeck's letter to Joseph Bryan III regarding the translation reaffirms this very fact. As he writes,

But my subject gets huger and more difficult all the time. It isn't fairy stories. It has to do with morals. Arthur must awaken not by any means only to repel the enemy from without, but particularly the enemy inside. Immorality is what is destroying us, public immorality. The failure of man toward men, the selfishness that puts making a buck more important than the common weal.

Now, next to our own time the 15th century was the most immoral time we know. Authority was gone. The church split, the monarchy without authority and manorial order disappearing. It is my theory that Malory was deploring this by bringing back Arthur and a time when such things were not so. A man must write about his own time no matter what symbols he uses. And I have not found my symbols nor my form. And there's the rub (A Life in Letters, pp.649-650).

Similarly he wrote to Dag Hammarskjold,

I arrived at home for the culmination of the TV scandal. Except as a sad and dusty episode, I am not deeply moved by the little earnest, cheating people involved, except insofar as they are symptoms of a general immorality which pervades every level of our national life and perhaps the life of the whole world. It is very hard to raise boys to love and respect virtue and learning when the tools of success are chicanery, treachery, self-interest, laziness and cynicism or when charity is deductible, the courts venal, the highest public official placid, vain, slothful and illiterate. How can I teach my boys the value and beauty of language and thus communication when the President himself reads westerns exclusively and cannot put together a simple English sentence?" (A Life in Letters, p.653)

Later to Lawrence Hagy, an old boyhood friend, he penned these words, "Also I learned about men, how some are good and some

are bad, and how most are some of both" (A Life in Letters, p.654).

Thus, duality, the reassurance that somewhere in us there is a "noble taint" (A Life in Letters, p.675), may thus legitimately be said to be the crux of all Steinbeck's work. He even found the characteristic obvious in himself and in his close family and friends. As he says of his sons,

They are 15 and 17 and they have all of the faults and some of the graces the race is subject to. They are bright and intelligent and they fail in school. They are slaves of love for everything that walks upright and some things that do not. They are young agonies and very beautiful (A Life in Letters, pp.708-709).

In fact, Steinbeck's sense of doubt and trust, a sense of duality and moral ambiguity, extended even to the Christ, whose last words on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me," emphasize His truly human side. Christ's straight-line life, without any deviation or doubt, no longer is an absolute and in these heart-wrenching words, Christ becomes an Everyman. (See A Life in Letters, pp.795-796.) The human, yet divine, Son of God also struggled with the dilemma of duality.

The final letter cited by Wallsten and Steinbeck reiterates this preoccupation with mankind's dual nature.

All of my life has been aimed at one book and I haven't started it yet. The rest has all been practice. Do you remember the Arthurian legend well enough to raise in your mind the symbols of Launcelot and his son Galahad? You see, Launcelot was imperfect and so he never got to see the Holy Grail. So it is with all of us. The Grail is always one generation ahead of us. But it is there and so we can go on bearing sons who will bear sons who may see

the Grail. This is a most profound set of symbols...In himself he must fail as Launcelot failed--for the Grail is not a cup. It's a promise that skips ahead--it's a carrot on a stick and it never fails to draw us on. So it is that I would greatly prefer to die in the middle of a sentence in the middle of a book and so leave it as all life must be--unfinished. That's the law, the great law (A Life in Letters, p.859).

Based on the preceding evidence, a careful reexamination of the previously mentioned neglected and misunderstood works in the Steinbeck canon is certainly indicated, for Steinbeck gave many signals in his more accepted fictional works, in his non-fiction and his journals, and in his correspondence that moral ambiguity was his major fixation as well as his major message for mankind. Using this thematic emphasis, the American dilemma of moral ambiguity, one may more easily understand Steinbeck's The Pastures of Heaven, The Long Valley, The Pearl, East of Eden, and The Winter of Our Discontent. Each of these works has suffered from critics who have approached them with their own preoccupations rather than from the unique perspective held by the author, John Steinbeck, a master at delineating man's dual nature.

## CHAPTER II

### A HEAVEN OF HELL, A HELL OF HEAVEN: THE CREATION OF THE PASTURES OF HEAVEN FROM THE CORRAL DE TIERRA

The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck's third novel, had a controversial reception in the early stages of its publication and its consequent reputation also fluctuated widely. Critic Peter Lisca calls the work a collection of short stories, stating that it is not "strictly speaking, a novel, partly because the several stories are too autonomous structurally and aesthetically." (1) His contention is that most critics

have missed the importance of the Munroe family and have tried to make too much of the stories' unity by pinning them together with some other theme: the contrast between dream and reality, the realization of life through illusion, and the suppression of the individual by society. (2)

In closing his analysis, he notes that the work

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(1) Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, (New York, 1958), pp.58-59.

(2) Lisca, p.59.

reveals his [Steinbeck's] disengagement from the romantic materials of Cup of Gold and the unwieldy mythical paraphernalia of To a God Unknown; and it announces his preoccupation with fresh materials much closer at hand -- the ordinary people of his "long valley." (3)

Another analysis by John Fontenrose attributes the book's relative failure to the fact that Steinbeck's name meant little to the reading public, although the work should have established Steinbeck's reputation as an important novelist [since] "the writing is simple, strong, objective, often moving, and the characterization is excellent." (4) Yet critics such as Lester J. Marks and Woodburn O. Ross ignore Pastures completely as a significant work, not even mentioning it when delineating the progress in the Steinbeck canon.

Several critics, however, did catch the reiteration of Steinbeck's interest in morality in Pastures. As Levant notes, "This framework is a series of ironic contrasts between good, primitive, or 'natural' behavior and bad, civilized or 'unnatural' behavior." (5) However, in a negative vein, he also states, "The contrasts have the disadvantage of tending to exist (although delightfully) for themselves and to reveal their limited reference all too quickly." (6) He further notes that irony dominates every section of the novel and that at its end, "The reader is safely left to draw the moral

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(3)Lisca, p.71.

(4)Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York, 1963), p.20.

(5)Howard Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study, (Columbia, Missouri, 1974), p.37.

(6)Levant, pp.36-37.

conclusion that any valley is or means what men make of it." (7) However, Levant's major criticism centers on the details of description and characterization that Steinbeck lavishes on the novel. He states, "Here, then as in earlier work, Steinbeck commits the basic error of presenting materials that are not fused with an intended structure." (8) Although in themselves there are brilliant passages, Levant describes Steinbeck's "bit of fun" in word utilization as incongruent with his framework. Thus, indirection of structure becomes a significant flaw, and Levant concludes that "Steinbeck's overt aims in The Pastures of Heaven are badly confused, in spite of his cogent letter." (9)

Fontenrose also perceives the thematic emphasis, but unlike Levant he is impressed by the structure

The curse theme is the string upon which the particular myths are strung like beads. The necklace is boxed within the myth of earthly paradise, expressed in title, prologue, and epilogue. [It is a] realtor's vision of earthly paradise, realistic, and realizable. The real world, the Munroe family, was bound to break in. The valley had a kind of idyllic charm before the Munroes came, but it was a paradise built on illusions, neuroses, evasions--an unstable Eden. (10)

However, despite receiving more praise than blame, The Pastures of Heaven has continued to remain relatively obscure and has failed to attract the critical attention it deserves. Indeed, a close examination reveals that the work is a major

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(7) Levant, p. 37.

(8) Levant, p. 38.

(9) Levant, p. 41.

(10) Fontenrose, p. 28.

effort, well-organized and crafted, and presenting once again Steinbeck's preoccupation with the dual nature of man and his actions. His attempt to deal with this paradox, that man could be simultaneously "good" and "bad," however, continued to plague some critics who felt that such a viewpoint revealed an inconsistency that was a fatal handicap to an artist.

For example, Robert Murray Davis, in his introduction to Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays, offers this accusation. "Steinbeck was rarely able to yoke opposites. Instead, he embraced one simplicity, whether of idea or character at a time. Never is there any complexity." (11) I believe such a viewpoint is untenable and that Steinbeck's major strength was indeed his ability to portray paradoxical duality; this portrayal in turn led not to simplicity but to an intricate and involved thematic emphasis on man's nature and the moral ambiguity from which he suffered. In fact, since Steinbeck is unwilling to present a simple plot or solution without a complex undergirding, he takes the risk that his structure may or may not be caught by the perceptive reader. Thus, in The Pastures of Heaven, he reveals that the "simple" decisions are complex and that the good is inextricably mixed with the bad. As a result, Steinbeck risked being labeled inconsistent and confusing. Although his fluctuating attitude was accurate, it was totally

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(11) Robert Murray Davis, Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), pp.6-7.



misinterpreted by critics who attempted to classify his thematic emphases and attitude toward man as simplistic absolutes. However, Steinbeck's portrayal of man's paradoxical and complicated life refuses to be either categorized or stereotyped.

In fact, as Steinbeck began his writing of The Pastures of Heaven, his correspondence indicates that he was particularly fascinated by the moral ambivalence he observed in the actions of the Munroes, a thinly-veiled, real, yet fictional, family whose intrusion into the Edenic Pastures of Heaven affects the entire community. As he states in a letter to Mavis McIntosh, dated May 8, 1931,

The present work [The Pastures of Heaven] interests me and perhaps falls in the "aspects" theme you mention. There is, about twelve miles from Monterey, a valley in the hills called Corral de Tierra. Because I am using its people I have named it Las Pasturas del Cielo. The valley was for years known as the happy valley because of the unique harmony which existed among its twenty families. About ten years ago a new family moved in on one of the ranches. They were ordinary people, ill-educated but honest and as kindly as any. In fact, in their whole history I cannot find that they have committed a really malicious act nor an act which was not dictated by honorable expediency or out-and-out altruism. But about the Morans there was a flavor of evil. Everyone they came in contact with was injured. Every place they went dissension sprang up. There have been two murders, a suicide, many quarrels and a great deal of unhappiness in the Pastures of Heaven, and all of these things can be traced directly to the influence of the Morans. So much is true. (12)

Yet this "truth" about the Munroes, which forms the

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(12) John Steinbeck, Steinbeck: A Life In Letters, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Hallsten (New York, 1975), pp.42-43.

framework for the episodic stories that comprise the novel, was difficult for Steinbeck to understand or explain. Traditionally he thought of bad as intentional and preplanned, whereas good was often spontaneous and free-willed. The story of the Munroes, however, was a contradiction that upset that stereotyped thought and presented a far more accurate and more human picture. According to the novel, evil may grow out of purely good intention and may even spring from a mindless involvement in another's affairs, where no particular end was desired, either good or bad, but where negative results occur even from seemingly harmless interaction.

The tone established by Steinbeck regarding such duality is rather bleak and depressing and, for the most part, the paradoxes described above are frustrating and debilitating, rather than freeing and enabling. Such an outlook is typical of other early Steinbeck works where the lack of black and white moral boundaries results in confusion and dismay rather than in acceptance and hope. As Steinbeck examined moral values in more detail, his negative reaction to ambiguity would change significantly.

Steinbeck structures this book within a time frame of past, present and future. The past and future comprise the first and last chapters, while Chapters II through IX deal with the present. Chapter I looks back in time to the initial discovery of the secluded valley by a Spanish captain who is returning with Indian slaves who have recently escaped the

domination of the Church and State only to be recaptured. Almost immediately the ironic and sarcastic tone of Steinbeck is evident. With tongue in cheek, Steinbeck identifies the "men of God" (or moral rectitude) as the Spaniards. However, these "holy" men have converted the pagan Indians by force, subjected them to hard labor and harsh punishment and now plan to return them to slavery in chains. Levant notes that "The ironic contrast points to the line of chained, subdued Indians (they are being led back to work and salvation, certainly not to green pastures) and, in a wider scope much later in time--to the corporal's own imprisonment by his companions." (13) The corporal is portrayed as a symbolic Moses who finds the tribe practicing sexual abominations in the bottom of a ferny canyon. Although he assumes moral superiority, his action with the slaves portrays him as guilty of sin as the aborigines. Yet through his evil quest to recapture the Indians and reharness their brick-building skill, he finds Las Pasturas del Cielo. Steinbeck describes his reaction in this way.

He who had whipped brown backs to tatters, he whose rapacious manhood was building a new race for California, this bearded, savage bearer of civilization slipped from his saddle and took off his steel hat.

"Holy Mother!" he whispered. "Here are the green pastures of Heaven to which our Lord leadeth us." (14)

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(13) Levant, p.37.

(14) John Steinbeck, The Pastures of Heaven, (New York, 1932), p.2. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parentheses within the text of this paper.

Ironically, good is found because of evil, and even more surprisingly, Las Pasturas remains untouched and verdant since the Spanish corporal is unable to return to his find. Even eventual civilization by a few families does not change its Edenic stature as the settlers cultivate the land and place unnatural boundaries called fences. As Steinbeck finishes the introduction, the little Paradise between the mountains is surely described in positive tones. "The families at last lived prosperously and at peace. Their land was rich and easy to work. The fruits of their gardens were the finest produced in central California" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.3).

Predictably, Steinbeck does not maintain the idyllic picture for longer than one paragraph; in fact, the second chapter begins with the infiltration of evil since no spot on earth can remain unsoiled forever. In this case, the curse is seen in the old Battle farm, a once verdant and pleasant acreage which is now deserted, sodden with gloom and threatening with impending menace. This detail, when combined with the fact that the real model for The Pastures of Heaven was a valley called Corral de Tierra, the enclosed or trapped earth, further stresses Steinbeck's emphasis on the inseparability of and the intermingling of good and evil. Even the physical setting of the farm re-echoes Steinbeck's initial suggestion of its duality. It is good land, well-watered and fertile, but it has been abandoned. Everything is untended; weeds have sprung up in abundance and

the fruit trees, untamed and uncared for, have become gnarled and knotty, producing more quantity but less quality (The Pastures of Heaven, p.4). It is another of Steinbeck's fallen Edens, a paradise shaken by sin and transformed into a worldly garden complete with natural defects. Steinbeck describes the Battle farm as "a weedy blot between two finely cultivated, contented pieces of land. The people of the valley considered it a place of curious evil for one horrible event and one impenetrable mystery had taken place there" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.5).

The horrible event involved the Battles themselves. George Battle had migrated from New York in 1863, but had encountered problems from the very beginning of his settlement in The Pastures of Heaven. First, his mother had died enroute to California to live with him. Then his wife was afflicted with epilepsy and eventually confined to a mental sanitorium where "she spent the rest of her existence crocheting a symbolic life of Christ in cotton thread" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.6). As a consequence of these events, George's involvement with nature becomes corrupted. His devotion to his garden eliminates his devotion to man, especially to his son. Steinbeck distinctly describes him as reverting to animal traits, his hands hard and black and covered with little crevices like the pads of a bear. (The Pastures of Heaven, p.6) Since Battle's only concern is the Eden of his property, he no longer interacts with individuals. Instead,

he waits for another pastoral Sylvia to complete his garden paradise and becomes a perfect farming machine. The narrator describes his attitude in this way: "Only the fruit trees and the fresh green rows of vegetables were vital. His hands were permanently hooked, had become sockets into which the handles of tools fitted tightly" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.7). George Battle had lost his humanity and feelings and had been transformed into a mechanical automaton. His symbolic name indicates his dilemma - his fight to decide which of the opposite polarities of his being he will allow to control his life.

Even as his father maintained the extreme of non-involvement with humanity, the son, John Battle, becomes over-involved--infected with a mad knowledge of God. "He covered his clothes and hat with tiny cross stitches in white thread and thus armored, made war on the dark legions" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.7). However, his overzealousness for God and against Satan brought him the same fate as his father gained by overzealously loving his land. In John's case, he met an early death by a serpent, the tool of the devil. Neither extreme--spiritual involvement or involvement with nature -- had helped the owners to 'battle' the truth, the necessity for human interaction. Instead they had succumbed to "fate," fearing the middle grounds where man must admit the complexity of his human/ spiritual desires.

Thereafter, the farm becomes a symbol of the wild, a

haunted house that frightens all the inhabitants of Las Pasturas; it is said to be cursed. Then comes the mysterious event that reinforced the idea of a curse for the townspeople of Las Pasturas. New owners, the Mustrovics, occupy the land and proceed to create another new Eden with the soil while ignoring the house. Again a proper balance of necessary elements for life is not maintained and the Mustrovics mysteriously disappear one morning, just as they had mysteriously arrived.

The next occupants also seem bent on destroying the curse and creating a new Eden. Here I believe Steinbeck suggests both the progress of generations of mankind as well as their tendency to accept and be satisfied with inertia. The new residents are also searching for perfection and attempt to find renewal in refurbishing the house and in recultivating the land. Steinbeck describes the reason for Bert Munroe's coming to Las Pasturas as a last chance effort to escape the acts of Fate which were malignant to his success. The chapter continues to relate Bert's specific failures in a garage and in bean futures. However, he hopes that his move to Las Pasturas will bring him freedom from his supposed curse and a possibility that here he could attain the perfection and lasting success which had escaped him so often before. In this manner Bert seeks to deny his fallen humanity, to instead reach perfection.

Within a month his shoulders straightened, and his face

lost its haunted look. He became an enthusiastic farmer; he read exhaustively on farming methods, hired a helper and worked from morning until night. Every day was a new excitement to him. Every seed sprouting out of the ground seemed to renew a promise of immunity to him. He was happy, and because he was confident again, he began to make friends in the valley and to entrench his position. (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.18-19).

Steinbeck's description of the Munroe family, however, indicates how futile such a hope is. They are, in Calvin's words, "a fearful deformity" of the image of God.(15) Especially the children are described as flawed pieces of humanity. For example, the daughter, Mae, enjoys having friends who had disreputable pasts; the oldest son, Jimmy, possesses a Pandora's Box of remembered sins and potential evils; and the youngest, Manny, is described as a half-wit who is terrified into obedience and who often loses his self control (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.12-16). In fact, Steinbeck's interest in physical and mental grotesques may have grown from his perception of how corrupted morality affects fallen man; the remaining deformities merely echo or parallel the original one caused by sin. The Munroes are hardly candidates for perfection, yet they are also not prime examples of depravity either. Their sins are common, and they are "normal" as compared with the strange and silent Mistrovics and the radical Battles.

However, Steinbeck's early fatalistic view of mankind

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(15) John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian World, trans. by Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981), Vol. I, ch. XV, p.164.



leaves the Munroes no choice in their actions. Whether unwillingly or not, they are the source of the evil that spreads through Las Pasturas. Unknowingly, even their most innocent act can beget the evil which they have tried to escape in these heavenly surroundings. Even their positive attitude will not prevail against fate. Although Bert states "maybe my curse and the farm's curse got to fighting and killed each other off," one of the neighbors believes it is more likely that "Maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated and gone into a gopher hole like a pair of rattlesnakes. Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crawling around the Pastures the first thing we know" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.20). Although critic Richard Peterson assesses the problem of the Munroes as their middle class virtue which stifles individual growth and destroys individual talent, I believe his thematic solution is far too simplistic. The point Steinbeck continues to stress is that man fails to understand moral ambiguity and its value in his life. Man's real dilemma is his inability to distinguish between "right" and "wrong" and to shape his acts to bring about good. Instead, he succumbs to 'inherent' evil and rationalizes his choice by claiming he has none. The Munroes illustrate that even innocent searches for security and respectability may result in a multiplicity of wrongs and evil.(16)

As the novel continues, Steinbeck presents the Munroes as trapped in their destiny, unable to break the chain of failure in their own lives and fatally infecting the whole town with an unwanted and incurable disease. The actions of the Munroes are often trivial and tangential to the episodes which follow, but somehow they corrupt the environment and the individuals who live in *The Pastures of Heaven*. Unconsciously at times and maliciously at others, they invade fantasy worlds with reality, impose society's harsh expectations and demands on unsuspecting and unprepared individuals, and, in general, create a depressing and negative attitude, where positive and hopeful feelings were present. For example, they innocently invade one resident's life and impose their middle class values on a lifestyle that is already acceptable. Although unaware, they also destroy the fantasy worlds of three residents by forcing them to face harsh reality. In short, Steinbeck portrays a number of valley residents who are united by the need for some dream or illusion to give their life purpose, but the Munroes, with their middle-class virtues and realities, constantly appear to destroy their hope.<sup>(17)</sup> Ultimately, Steinbeck questions whether the bursting of their fantasy bubble is a positive or a negative event. However, the very existence of moral ambiguity precludes a definite

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(16) See Richard Peterson, "The Turning Point: *The Pastures of Heaven*," in *A Study Guide to Steinbeck: A Handbook to his Major Works*, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Metuchen, N.J., 1974), p.88.

answer. The Munroes may be simplistically categorized as the villains who destroy life-sustaining illusion, but the real dilemma of the valley is deeper. It is how to cope with a paradoxical world where right may breed wrong and vice versa.

For all of its placid outlook and pleasant surroundings, the Pastures of Heaven is far from a Paradise. In fact, it is apparent that its myth of promise may be far more illusory than real.(18) As I have pointed out, each of the characters examined by Steinbeck in Chapters II through XI lives in a world of illusion; as Fontenrose says, "In each the principal character had founded his tranquil life in the valley upon an unhealthy adjustment, an evasion of reality, an illusion, or an unrealizable dream; and a deed of a Munroe forced him to face the truth, if but for a moment."(19) Fontenrose, however, fails to acknowledge that for some of the characters these "evasions and unhealthy adjustments" are positive forces in their lives, allowing them to cope with the hardships of the world. Consequently, they either create a dream world for themselves where they find success and acceptance or they use the valley to wall out the harsh truths of their own everyday life. However, although so-called "negatives" function as "positives," the primal curse - the reality that separates fallen man from his perfect God - is not so easily walled out

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(17) See Peterson, p.89.

(18) See Peterson, p. 91.

(19) Fontenrose, p.25.

for each of the characters. As a result, most of the stories have a pessimistic, if not a sad and depressing ending, as each resident is forced to acknowledge his fallen state and to admit his Paradise is faulty.(20) Thus the early Steinbeck does not reveal the rich heritage man gains by acknowledging moral ambiguity and accepting its challenge. Instead man's dual nature becomes a stumbling block that results in further frustration with life.

Although several critics, including Peter Lisca and Howard Levant, are puzzled by the structure of the book and find it difficult to determine Steinbeck's design, Joseph Fontenrose's lucid explanation of the contrapuntal nature of each story reveals again Steinbeck's preoccupation with paradoxes and his delight in presenting one side of a problem while contrasting it with its opposite. None of the characters, even when they are polar opposites, achieve a lasting peace and contentment in Las Pasturas de Cielo. Instead they are trapped by the ambiguous moral choices they must face even in the valley of perfection. Steinbeck's goal for his readers would seem to be a realization that no virtues or even so-called vices will be able to block out the ambiguous nature of man's moral dilemma and the confounding state of being where evil may beget good and vice versa.

Chapter II presents the illusion of Edward "Shark"

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(20) See Fontenrose, p.28.

Wicks, who is known for his craftiness in business and who has respect from his fellow townspeople, but not the money they believe he has. Steinbeck states he "cheated ethically" and that he was comfortable living the lie that he was a "shark" when it came to investments. Wicks even goes so far as to keep an imaginary bank account and ledger to record his success. In addition, he is also quick to protect himself by further lies, should any of his speculations turn out disastrously.

Sadly, Shark's imaginary life of success does not extend to his marriage to Katherine Mullock. Steinbeck describes their union as functional and caused by precedent and expectation. In fact, the author suggests that Wicks treats his spouse as an animal.

In his treatment of her, Shark was neither tender nor cruel. He governed her with the same gentle inflexibility he used on horses. Cruelty would have seemed to him as foolish as indulgence. He never talked to her as to human, never spoke of his hopes or thoughts or failures, of his paper wealth nor of the peach crop. Katherine would have been puzzled and worried if he had (The Pastures of Heaven, p.25).

Eventually the product of their marriage, a daughter, Alice, becomes Wicks' obsession, his one chance at perfection, this time not imaginary, but real. Steinbeck once again inserts moral ambiguity by suggesting that this ideal and beautiful baby was not the usual "horrible reptilian creature" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.25), fallen man tricked by the snake. Alice astounds everyone, even her mother, who is described as

full of awe and misgiving at her beauty (The Pastures of Heaven, p. 26).

Katherine, though often naive and uninvolved, senses that Alice's perfection is "too marvelous to be without retribution." She believes it is better to have her feet firmly planted in reality; her husband, on the other hand, is unable to change his dream. In fact, Shark becomes almost as obsessed with maintaining the purity of his daughter as he is with building his imaginary wealth. Both are Edens which will not be trespassed on or exposed to the common folk.

Yet both Shark and Katherine realize there is a flaw in the almost perfect Alice. Like Aylmer's Georgiana in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," she has a blemish which denies her perfectibility. Both father and mother "knew that their lovely daughter was an incredibly stupid, dull and backward girl" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.28). Yet, despite this defect, Shark continues to elevate his little girl and to treat her as a virgin goddess. "Month by month, this chastity came to symbolize her health, her preservation, her intactness" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.29).

Similarly, Shark's other Eden, his imaginary wealth, also flourishes in his imagination under his careful management and concern. He plans investments, orders stock, forecloses on mortgages, and attempts to get the best rate of interest on his fantasy dollars. However, Alice is still his primary joy and symbol of the ideal, and, given the previous

description of the oldest Munroe son, Jimmie, it is not at all surprising that he is drawn to her. Steinbeck's initial description of Jimmy in Chapter I emphasizes his "hidden" sins and in Chapter II the portrait is sharpened. He is described as sensual, cocky, rakish, dissipated and cynical (The Pastures of Heaven, p.31). He has a reputation for kissing girls, drinking gin and having sinful adventures, and his reputation soon becomes well known by Shark Wicks, who considers him the primary threat to Alice's perfection or virginity.

Although Wicks' suspicions turn out to be well founded regarding Alice, he could hardly realize that Jimmie would destroy not one, but both, of his Edens in one fell blow. Ironically, while Shark is away at a funeral, both his dream worlds, his Edens, are dying at home. He plans to reinvest his imaginary money for higher interest while paying his respects to his Aunt Nellie, but, by leaving his daughter unprotected for several days, he loses both of his perfect possessions - her virtue and his imaginary wealth.

Steinbeck portrays both Alice and Katherine as uncomfortable with the almost prison-like observation of Wicks, and therefore, it is believable that as soon as he is gone, they indulge in what he has forbidden - going to a town dance. At first, Alice's beauty is not an asset. Rather, surprisingly, it awes the boys and makes them consciously embarrassed and unwilling to take the risk to talk to such

beauty. But the "bad" Jimmie Munroe is not so shy, and by the end of the evening is even able to procure a kiss from the naive and innocent Alice. Wicks, on returning, is immediately confronted with Alice's "sin." This time Steinbeck has a minor character, T.B. Allen, struggle with the moral choice of whether he ought to tell Shark the truth. The juicy gossip, however, is far too strong and overcomes Allen's "dislike for saying just what had happened, a natural aversion for scandal" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.40). T.B.'s revelation suggests that the kiss, however trivial, is tantamount to marriage. This statement, of course, strikes Shark with a great sense of loss, and his natural reaction is to stare meaninglessly around Allen's general store.

Here Steinbeck lets the moral ambiguity rise again. Allen assumes Wicks is looking at the gun case on the wall and says "Don't do nothing, Shark. Them guns ain't yours" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.41). Though Steinbeck avers that Shark hadn't seen the guns at all, the innocent remark by Allen sets Wicks' mind to work, and he spontaneously picks up the gun. The intended good of Allen has been transformed into evil. Once outside, Wicks realizes that he is trapped. He knows he does not want to murder Jimmie, but it might be necessary in order to maintain his dignity and his reputation in Las Pasturas. Ironically, when he decides he simply could not shoot anybody and that he will just go home, he is arrested by the local sheriff. At this point, Bert Munroe destroys Wicks'



other Eden by forcing him to put up a bond to keep the peace. The size of the bond, again unwittingly suggested by a minor character, the sheriff, is too large for Wicks to pay, and he is forced to admit that his fortune is only imaginary.

Steinbeck closes the story by portraying Wicks after his fall. "The next morning Shark Wicks walked listlessly into his house and lay down on his bed. His eyes were dull and tired, but he kept them open. His arms lay as loosely as a corpse's arms beside him. Hour after hour he lay there" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.43). Wicks has met the curse head on, and it has defeated him. His wife, however, is "bitterly glad of the slump of his shoulders and of his head's weak carriage" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.43).

It is as though reality - the bad - has opened a door on Wicks' stagnant life and made Katherine see the potential for good. As Katherine stroked his head gently, "the great genius continued to grow in her. She felt larger than the world. The whole world lay in her lap and she comforted it. Pity seemed to make her huge in stature. Her soothing breasts yearned toward the woe of the world" (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.44-45). Consequently, Katherine's support and newly found confidence in herself relieves Wicks. Indeed, the fact that she herself believes in him imbues in him a possibility to believe in himself. "His eyes lost their awful lifelessness and as he looked, her genius passed into him" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.45).

Wicks' last speech bespeaks his determination to leave the isolated valley where his fantasy has flourished and to move to the town where he may be able to shape a reality of success by transposing his imaginary actions into actual work. Although the ending seems positive in that loneliness and isolation in a marriage is broken and reality/effort is substituted for a fantasy/dream world, Steinbeck does not allow the reader to affirm his hope that the positive will continue. Katherine is described as frightened when the power is leaving her and is forgotten by Shark. Perhaps the move will be nothing more than a change in locale with different unattainable dreams and Edens in the city. The episode ends in ambiguity without resolving whether the Wicks have benefited or lost from the pricking of fantasy bubbles. Perhaps they have just substituted an ugly materialistic dream for the "idyllic" life of Las Pasturas.

The next episode is, as Fontenrose suggests, a reversal of some of the details of the Wicks' story. "Alice Wicks was beautiful and stupid; Tularecito was ugly and stupid. Alice had no talents: Tularecito had a strange skill. Nobody adequately realized Alice's limitations; everybody was aware of Tularecito's" (21). These connections, emphasizing parallels and contradictions, continue to remind the reader of Steinbeck's fascination with music, especially The Art of the

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(21) Fontenrose, pp.25-26.

Fugue by Bach. In fact, it is an established fact that Steinbeck himself had thought of combining Pastures of Heaven with another unpublished work titled Dissonant Symphony. (22) In addition in his later work, Journal of a Novel, Steinbeck affirms how much of his writing is like a fugue - a similar melody is picked up and repeated in another voice. But the variations and dissonances which are produced make the listeners aware of the differences as well as the similarities in the music.

Besides the similarities to Alice and the reversal of characters suggested by Fontenrose, there are several other subtle connections which are related to the first episode. Like Wicks, Tuleracito is isolated. However, his loneliness is not because he is respected or set on a pedestal, but because he is different - misshapen and idiotic. He, too, is looking for perfection, a place where he fits in or belongs, and his fits of anger at not being able to find perfection or having it destroyed by others are also similar to Wicks' reaction when his Edens are destroyed.

Steinbeck begins with the finding of the baby, Tuleracito, by Pancho, the hired man of Franklin Gomez. As most inhabitants of the valley, Pancho himself indulges in morally ambiguous acts. Every three months he goes to Monterey to confess his sins, to do his penance, to be shriven

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(22) Steinbeck, A Life In Letters, p.43.

and, ironically, to get drunk and have illicit sex. Already, Steinbeck is suggesting that the intermingling of good with evil is a human trait and must be accepted. The baby that Pancho finds and later names Tuleracito, also possesses this intertwining of moral opposites. Although he is named "little frog," Gomez often called him "Coyote," "'for,' he said, 'there is in this boy's face that ancient wisdom one finds in the face of a coyote'" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.48).

Similar opposites are seen in Steinbeck's descriptions of Tuleracito's ability. His talent is in his hands. They are dexterous and strong. They could defy hard knots, and at the same time, be mercifully gentle when planting young seedlings. Two other opposite talents of his hands are his ability to kill turkeys by wringing their necks and to carve animals in sandstone with his fingernails (The Pastures of Heaven, p.49). As in any man, however, Tularecito's goodness is not always evident. In fact, here Steinbeck creates Tularecito as almost schizophrenic.

If any person, man, woman or child, handled carelessly or broke one of the products of his hands, he became furious. His eyes shone and he attacked the desecrator murderously. On three occasions when this had happened, Franklin Gomez tied his hands and feet and left him alone until his ordinary good nature returned (The Pastures of Heaven, p. 50).

Due to his strange talents and his changing personality, it is unlikely that Tularecito would interact well with others. Yet, local law (determined without thought for the individual) demands that he go to school. Once again, what was designed

to be good turns out bad for the deformed child.

At school, although his artistic talent is discovered and praised as a gift of God, it is soon destroyed by unwitting fourth graders who erase the drawing from the board. Tularecito's violent reaction of chastising the culprits who erased his work and finally of emptying the school in order to redo his animals, has been prefigured by Steinbeck in his character's violent reaction to the earlier breaking of his sandstone carving. However, Miss Martin's reaction of demanding that Tularecito be beaten is not foreshadowed. No doubt, most readers are appalled that the God-fearing teacher asks for retribution for Tularecito's crime and ends up calling him an animal. When Franklin Gomez defends him and suggests "but surely he is a good animal," Miss Martin can only reply, "He is dangerous and ought to be locked up" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.53). She is unwilling to accept the duality of this "creature," although he is quite like her in his good/bad moods. Gomez's reply, on the other hand, indicates that he understands and accepts the intermingling of good and evil in Tularecito.

This little Frog should not be going to school. He can work; he can do marvelous things with his hands, but he cannot learn to do the simple little things of the school. He is not crazy; he is one of those whom God has not quite finished" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.53).

Sadly society is unwilling to accept such an analysis and persists in regulating Tuleracito in the classroom.

The story continues with the arrival of a new teacher,

Miss Morgan, who is more understanding and helpful than Miss Martin. Probably modeled after Steinbeck's mother, Olive Hamilton, Miss Morgan is innovative and exciting and makes a practice of reading exciting grown-up stories aloud to the class. Tularecito, however, continues to be only interested in his art.

[He] would try to understand how these distant accounts of the actions of strangers could be of interest to anyone. To him they were chronicles of actual events--else why were they written down. The stories were like the lessons. Tularecito did not listen to them (The Pastures of Heaven, p.55).

Shortly thereafter, Miss Morgan begins to tell tales of fairies, gnomes, elves, and brownies to appeal to the younger children. Suddenly, Tularecito's attitude changes. The inquisitive, exciting attitude of his teacher, and her belief in fairies and a fantasy world, touches him. His dream world begins to develop - a people he could belong to, look like and live with - an underground people who would accept him. When confronted with Tularecito's fantasy of finding his "people" as she is walking home, Miss Martin is torn between maintaining and encouraging it as imaginative and healthful, or exposing the truth and destroying it entirely.

Miss Morgan thought: "Why should I deny gnomes to this queer, unfinished child? Wouldn't his life be richer and happier if he did believe in them? And what harm could it possibly do?"...All the way home she pictured him searching in the night. The picture pleased her. He might even find the gnomes, might live with them and talk to them. With a few suggestive words she had been able to make his life unreal and very wonderful, and separated from the stupid lives about him. She deeply envied him his searching (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.58-59).

Thus once again Steinbeck pictures moral ambiguity since Tuleracito's unreal fantasy can have both bad and good characteristics at the same time. After Franklin Gomez's conversation with Miss Morgan, the superstitious Pancho reaffirms the idiot boy's belief in gnomes by telling him to return to the devil, his father. As a result, Tularecito, in supreme happiness, sets out once more to find his people. Once again the good intentions of someone have caused evil. Miss Morgan's positive wishes for Tularecito are warped and distorted as Tularecito ends up in Bert Munroe's orchard, where he proceeds to dig a large hole in order to find his people in the cool earth. The fugue theme reoccurs since his digging is destroyed by Munroe, who fills up the hole with dirt. At first Tularecito is angry, but he determines to redig the hole; immediately his dream expands. Tuleracito thinks to himself:

They didn't know who it was, and they were frightened. They filled up the hole the way a gopher does. This time I'll hide, and when they come to fill the hole, I'll tell them who I am. Then they will love me" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.62).

When Munroe returns the next day to again fill in the hole, he is attacked and badly injured by the halfwit who sees him as another alien determined to stop his homecoming. The act is brutal, but given the motivation of Tularecito, Steinbeck seems to indicate it must be judged by another standard than the conventional norm, and it is not "bad" in itself.

Once again it is obvious that society does not allow for

ambiguity and does not accept the blurred patterns of right or wrong as the author does. Just as the law demands that Tularecito go to school till he is 18, so too it demands that he be punished. The judge refuses custody to Gomez, saying, "You say he is a good boy. Just yesterday he tried to kill a man. You must see that we cannot let him go loose. Sooner or later he will succeed in killing someone" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.63).

Sadly, the constant intermingling of evil and good in Tularecito is not recognized and accepted, and he is committed to the asylum for the criminally insane in Napa. Like Wicks, Tularecito's dream world of perfection which has been built with the assistance of the well-meaning Miss Morgan has been shattered by the unknowing Bert Munroe, whose "cause" destroys yet another dream-world in Las Pasturas and removes another life sustaining illusion through interaction with the harsh world of reality.

The duality of the situation exists because the story of Helen Van Deventer which follows is, as Fontenrose notes, yet another counterpoint or presentation of reversals to the previous episode.

Tularecito searched for the little people, because they were his own people, but never found them; Hilda Van Deventer saw them in dreams and visions without wanting to, since they tormented her. Tularecito, not insane, was committed to a mental hospital; Hilda, quite mad, was never committed.(23)

Peterson also sees the two stories as providing an ironic



inversion of the previous tale.

Tularecito represents the sub-human, mentally deficient, animal-like creatures, who, nevertheless, remain what Franklin Gomez calls "good animals." On the other hand, Hilda and, eventually, Helen Van Deventer are mentally unbalanced or demented individuals who, as "disturbed animals," remain a constant threat to do serious harm.(24)

In addition, the isolation of the death/loneliness theme is repeated as Helen Van Deventer has only three months of wedded life before her husband is killed in a freak hunting accident, leaving her to cope with a daughter who is mentally ill. Mrs. Van Deventer apologizes to her doctor for not having the strength to bear a perfect child, but it appears as if she is determined to find the perfection lost in the child in her own endurance. Her daughter, Hilda, like Tularecito, sees creatures of the night, but her initiation is unlike his in that they frighten and terrify, rather than please. When Hilda reaches puberty, her condition worsens, but her mother refuses to acknowledge the dilemma of keeping her at home. As Dr. Phillips tells Helen, "You love the hair-shirt. Your pain is pleasure. You won't give up any little shred of tragedy" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.78). Indeed, Steinbeck's moral ambiguity is operative again as Mrs. Van Deventer enjoys her daughter's illness and proceeds to isolate herself even more by moving to Las Pasturas and building a house protected by oak bars where she will hide her deformed

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(23) Fontenrose, p.26.

(24) Peterson, p.99.

offspring from society. She is exultant in the prison-like atmosphere.

The new home is again an Eden; it is even located in Christmas Canyon, a prospect of hope. Steinbeck describes its positive side in these words:

"Every log is perfect, and what do you know, they've got gardeners working there already. They're bringing in big plants and trees all in bloom, and setting them in the ground."...Bays and oaks were left in the lawn and under them grew cinerarias, purple and white and blue. The walks were hedged with lobelias of incredible blue (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.71-72).

However, the paradise is short-lived as the curiosity of the neighbors invades its peacefulness. Bert Munroe, the first visitor, justifies his presence by saying that he is concerned by the needs of a neighbor. However, he really is just nosey and ends up confronting Hilda and promising her help. However well-meaning, his promise motivates Hilda to run away from home. Meanwhile, Hilda's mother in her own way fosters another form of moral ambiguity. She has resigned herself to a feeling of hopeless gloom, feeling she owes it to her husband as a kind of memorial that must be paid to him. But through this well-intentioned mourning, she complicates her life and ruins her potential for happiness.

Ironically, just as she is feeling a new sense of peace, of being protected and clothed against the tragedies which have beset her, the final tragedy, Helen's second disappearance, occurs. Again Steinbeck presents the picture of paradise with peace sweeping from the hillsides and a

tranquil countryside with flourishing wildlife. The hunter/destroyer image of her husband has just been set aside for Mrs. Van Deventer's own preference for peaceful harmony with nature. But in the midst of this peace and bursting expectancy, one of the Munroe's has inadvertently created chaos since, due to Bert's interference, Hilda sees the paradise only as a prison from which she must escape.

The escape, however, is far more permanent than might have been imagined. Helen reverts to the ways of the past; as Steinbeck states "her face paled and her lips set in the old line of endurance" (The Pastures of Heaven, p. 83). Ultimately she is driven to savagery. Although the final paragraphs maintain the ambiguity, Steinbeck clearly wishes the reader to believe that Helen has killed her own daughter to avoid having her committed to an insane asylum. Thus, evil murder is justified in that it will prove a good - a prevention of a frustrating incarceration not unlike Tuleracito's. Surprisingly, Helen's reactions to Hilda's death are neither fear nor shock. They are merely a deadly acceptance of her role in life - a role which does not allow the flexibility of good and evil and their interchangeability. Instead it restores hell and human suffering to an unstable Eden, again emphasizing Steinbeck's early view that depravity/sinfulness is man's inescapable heritage which, more than likely, will have disastrous and depressing results as it asserts a primary pull on man. As Calvin says in The

Institutes, "It is indeed true that all thought, intelligence, discernment and industry are so defective that, in the sight of the Lord, we cannot think or aim at anything that is right."(25)

The sixth episode, the story of Junius Maltby, truly indicates Steinbeck's vision for perfection . Counterpoint is again evident with the plot of the Van Deventers. As Fontenrose states: "Helen Van Deventer lost her husband just before her daughter was born and worked hard at rearing an insane child with final defeat. Junius Maltby lost his wife when his son was born, and without any effort reared a normal child".(26) In addition another contrast which Fontenrose misses is that here isolation and loneliness are seen in a much more positive light. Maltby, essentially a wanderer in the world of literature, has also retreated to the valley of Las Pasturas. But his retreat and solitary nature have made him happy, unlike Tularecito and Helen Van Deventer. As the narrator comments, the name of the valley pleased Maltby, who acknowledges its dual possibilities for him, "It's either an omen that I'm not going to live or else it's a nice symbolic substitute for death" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.86).

Eventually Junius' life in Las Pasturas reverts back to the natural and to nature; in fact, he gains weight and is quiet and happy in his laziness. A new Eden, unstructured and

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(25) Calvin, Vol. I, ch. II, p.244.

(26) Fontenrose, p.26.

sinless, yet beautiful because of its freedom, is pictured here. It is a solitary refuge where the literary Maltby can enjoy the fantasy world of books. Perhaps Steinbeck even portrays his own hopes and dreams in Maltby. However, despite the fact that he is not a threatening personality, his reputation in the valley varies. "Sometimes they hated him with the loathing busy people have for lazy ones, and sometimes they envied his laziness" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.90). Junius' laziness even corrupts his hired hand, an old German named Jakob Stutz. Soon Junius converts the old man to his idyllic way of life, and they even discuss Atlantis, the island of perfection. Their personal Eden, however, is covered with weeds and the remains of a "perfect" thicket of mallow (The Pastures of Heaven, p. 91).

Freedom to Jakob and Junius seems to be associated with detachment from the real world and immersion in a fantasy world of writers like Robert Louis Stevenson. Junius even continues to read in the face of the death of his wife and his stepchildren; it was there in the words that he found solace for his pain, an Eden, not physical, but mental. As he says to Jakob, "There are long-visioned minds and short vision. I've never been able to see things that are close to me" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.91). Art for Junius is more real than reality, and he proceeds to raise his son, Robbie, with the same appreciation of literature and learning. This education is both classical and exciting. It involves the

Greeks, the Parthenon and the friezes that symbolize a perfect society, horses bound for a celestial pasture (The Pastures of Heaven, p.92). Steinbeck describes the conversation of the two older men and the child in this way:

They didn't make conversation; rather they let a seedling of thought sprout by itself, and then watched with wonder while it sent out branching limbs. They were surprised at the strange fruit their conversation bore, for they didn't direct their thinking, nor trellis nor trim it the way so many people do (The Pastures of Heaven, p.93).

Yet in the process of their study, the three proceed to categorize good and evil, unaware of their intermingling and the duality inherent in their existence. For example, Junius says,

"It seems to me that a good thing or a kind thing must be very large to survive. Little good things are always destroyed by evil little things. Rarely is a big thing poisonous or treacherous. For this reason, in human thinking, bigness is an attribute of good and littleness of evil" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.94).

These generalizations are perceptive and portray Steinbeck's early pessimism about man. However they miss the mark when it comes to understanding the delicate balance of good and evil that needs to be maintained by the characters. As Steinbeck the narrator observes, "Thus they taught him nonsense" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.94), he reveals the world's lack of acceptance of duality; it is summarily dismissed in man's hopeful search for absolutes. Steinbeck then proceeds to illustrate Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage" in Maltby's action. In typical moral ambiguity, he portrays the evils (weeds, uncleanliness, idleness, lack of pride/

slothfulness, poverty, lack of acceptance by others) that accompany Junius' chosen life style. However, the reader is unsure that such stereotyping is accurate. Since Junius is oblivious to the criticisms of society, his Eden, such as it is, still makes him gloriously happy.

However, even his paradise is not fool proof. As in the story of Tularecito, society invades Maltby's world in terms of the school. Society recognizes its obligation to the child; after all, he was Mamie Quaker's child as much as Maltby's. Thus society decides that Robbie will be trained as he "should have been" and given the "advantages" he was denied by his shiftless father (The Pastures of Heaven, p.96). This incident once again provides an opportunity for Steinbeck to illustrate moral ambiguity in the duality of the law. As Maltby says, "The law has a self-protective appendage called penalty. We have to balance the pleasure of breaking the law against the punishment" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.96). However, it is evident that justice is often not accomplished nor mankind's best intentions met when the law is followed to its very letter.

Robbie's attendance at school depicts the value of the "natural" man vs. the "unnatural" laws of society. Robbie as the natural man is surprisingly self-dependent and a leader; his life style is envied rather than despised. In fact, several of the school boys sneak up to the Maltby place on Saturday and "while they sat on both sides of him, he [Junius]

read Treasure Island to them, or described the Gallic wars or the battle of Trafalgar" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.98). Yet school is not entirely happy for Robbie since its values are not the ones he is accustomed to. Although he doesn't fully understand the philosophy of Stevenson, which he quotes to Miss Morgan, ["There is nothing so monstrous but that we can believe it of ourselves"] (The Pastures of Heaven, p.100), he finds the idea fascinating and insightful. The quote again illustrates man's duality, his desire to be perfect, coupled with an inherent evil which corrupts him. As Calvin says, "It cannot be denied that the hydra lurks in every breast; so a soul, while teeming with such seeds of vice, cannot be called sound."(27) Steinbeck illustrates inherited "sin" in several imaginative actions of Robbie. The boys start a spy club to watch suspicious Japanese. Although they single out Takashi Kato, a third grader, for surveillance and harassment, their intent is not to seriously harm him. Yet there is potential for harm in this game. Steinbeck later diffuses this potential by having Takashi apply for membership in BASSFEAJ (Boys' Auxiliary Secret Service for Espionage Against the Japanese), and having Robbie realize the bond of unity of all humanity, rather than emphasize their diversity.

A similar incident is the simulated burning of the President of the U.S. by the 300 Indians (the boys' club) at

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(27) Calvin, Vol. I, ch. III, p.251.



Maltby's house. All the club members are invited to the "simulation" as Jakob Stutz portrays the president, a type of Guinevere needing to be rescued. This incident, no doubt, also paralleled the historical present when Steinbeck was writing and depicted a societal structure that was deeply in trouble. The fantasy, though, includes both sides of the human character, the evil or destructive, the side that wishes to destroy and inflict pain and suffering, and the heroic good side - that wishes to be caring and loving and considerate.

Miss Morgan, the school teacher, who happens to arrive during the ceremony, senses the duality of the Maltbys even before she observes the rite. Again Steinbeck shows a "flawed" Eden in his physical description (The Pastures of Heaven, p.104). The Eden is not perfect, and yet at the same time it is. As Miss Morgan describes it, "How run down and slovenly," yet she acknowledges, "how utterly lovely and slipshod" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.104). The outward appearance of the Maltby place, though "bad", still has an inner worth. Its essence is ambiguous. Even Junius' conversation later in the day combines man's "good" accomplishments with his "bad" ones,

That afternoon Junius talked of cannibal societies among the Aleutian Indians. He told how the mercenaries turned against Carthage. He described the Lacedemonians combing their hair before they died at Thermopylae. He explained the origin of macaroni, and told of the discovery of copper as though he had been there (The Pastures of Heaven, p.104).

His conversation also illustrates that even the trivial cannot

be separated from the significant according to absolute rules. Finally, Steinbeck ends the chapter with a quarrel between Stutz and Maltby on his idea of the eviction from the garden of Eden.

The concept of right and wrong is also found in the concluding vignette about the Maltbys, in which the school board visits the school looking for errors, mistakes and problems. Instead of positive change, their good intentions create tension and terror rather than a reassurance about caring people. Of course, the children perform their very worst during the visit, and, although tolerant of the majority of academic errors, the board picks up on the so-called social errors of Robbie Maltby. Again, the Munroes figure into the tragedy since it is Mrs. Munroe who suggests he be given decent clothes. Although Miss Morgan objects and tries to emphasize the wrong of this supposed right, Mrs. Munroe persists. This persistence continues even after Robbie's embarrassed exit confirms the mistake of the gift. The error has been made, and its effects are far-reaching. When school closes for Christmas, Miss Morgan observes the Maltbys leaving Las Pasturas. As Levant notes, they are dressed in "cheap new clothes, are shod with uncomfortable shoes and have the appearance of unhappiness."(28)

Due to the school incident, Junius has decided to leave

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(28) Levant, p.48.

his Eden for the city and the life of an accountant which he abandoned over twenty years ago. The well-meaning Mrs. Munroe has awakened him to his so-called poverty, a poverty that involved a lack of material, rather than spiritual, mental or physical wealth. Like Tularecito, Shark Wicks, and Helen Van Deventer before him, Maltby accepts the exile from the promised land knowing all too well that the duality of man and the existence of moral ambiguity usually bring destruction rather than growth.(29)

The next tale in the novel, the story of the Lopez sisters, continues the flawed Eden symbolism. As Steinbeck describes the physical location,

Practically nothing would grow on the starved soil except tumble-weed and flowering sage, and, although the sisters toiled mightily over a little garden, they succeeded in producing very few vegetables (The Pastures of Heaven, p.115),

he reaffirms the fact that nature is not always good. In fact, this ground is hardly the Eden Steinbeck has shown in the previous descriptions of the land of Las Pasturas. When combined with this fact, the other juxtaposition suggested by Fontenrose (that Maltby's lazy but moral life is contrasted to the lives of the Lopez sisters who are industrious and immoral) seems to prove that the story's placement next to the Maltby tale is not just coincidental. Additional evidence that the placement is purposeful is found in the fact that the

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(29)See Peterson, p.97, and Jackson Benson, John Steinbeck, Writer (New York, 1983), p.209.

endings of the two tales are reversals with Maltby leaving Las pasturas to find an "honourable" profession and the sisters doing just the opposite.(30)

The sisters, unlike Maltby, cannot make a sufficient living from the land and find themselves starving rather than enjoying their plot of ground. Therefore, Rosa and Maria resolve to open a business and to sell tortillas, enchiladas and tamales. Their reasoning is that since their food is good it will sell. However, such a happy event does not occur, and finally, when Maria is away, Rosa resorts to giving herself to a customer in order to enhance business. She does not, however, see this as evil; it is only an encouragement for the customers. The payment is for the food, not for the sexual favors, and forgiveness for the sin is readily available. Soon both sisters are involved in dual jobs of cook/purveyor of sexual favors. They both remain religious, however, and continue to resist the "money of shame," preferring to offer favors only when their food was purchased (The Pastures of Heaven, p.120).

Also, unlike Maltby, the happiness of the Lopez sisters revolves around interaction with others rather than isolation, and they are especially glad when they had enough money to purchase trivial material goods like boudoir caps and a phonograph. Unfortunately this happiness is shortlived as

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(30)Fontenrose, p.26. See also Peterson, pp.97-98.

rumors spread about the wares of the house. Unaware of the rumors, Maria sets off for Monterey with her horse, Lindo, only to meet another resident of Las Pasturas, Alan Hueneker, on the road. The husband of a jealous wife, Hueneker mistakenly accepts a ride with the "bad" woman. Although no sexual encounters or conversation take place, the pair are observed on the road by the Munroes. In typical ambiguity, Bert thinks how funny it would be to tell Huenecker's wife a joke that he ran off with Maria. However, the joke turns out to be cruel and heartless, since it destroys the sisters' happiness.

When Maria returns with flour and gifts, she is confronted by "a silent restrained Rosa, a grim and suffering Rosa" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.127). Her eyes are glazed and sightless as she relates the visit of the sheriff and his accusation about their "business." The sheriff requires them to shut their doors, using as an excuse that "he is a servant of the people who make complaints" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.128). Once again Steinbeck presents the law, the differentiation between bad and good, as arbitrary and unbending. The harsh law refuses to see that enforcement to the letter will force the sisters to starvation. Eventually as the story ends, the sheriff's actions instead force Rosa and Maria to accept a life of shame, a life of prostitution. They too will exile themselves from Las Pasturas and will choose great money in San Francisco rather than menial

existence in Las Pasturas.

Ironically, the joke of Bert Munroe has caused the "sin" of the Lopez sisters to really become bad and has destroyed their happiness and driven them from an idyllic garden where the motive for sex was "encouragement" to buy their wares, not a greedy desire for wealth. Thus Steinbeck reaffirms his belief in moral ambiguity and again emphasizes the dark side of duality, asserting that inevitably the good is overcome by evil. The fall from paradise occurs whether by planned or unplanned events; consequently man's dream or fantasy of Eden is either destroyed or it is replaced by a harsh reality. This also is echoed by Calvin in The Institutes when he states, "Man is so enslaved by the yoke of sin, that he cannot of his own nature aim at good either in wish or actual pursuit.(31)

The next related episode in the novel picks up the story of Molly Morgan, whom the reader has met briefly in the stories of Tularecito and Robbie Maltby. As Fontenrose points out, this episode is also contrapuntal to the previous story. Molly, important and good in the eyes of the townspeople, gives up reality to maintain a make-believe world. This is in direct contrast to the Lopez sisters, who are labeled bad but who give up a make-believe world to accept reality. However, both leave the valley, the Edenic paradise, as a consequence,

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(31) Calvin, Vol. II, ch. IV, p.265.

in a harsh fall brought on by a trivial action initiated by a Munroe.(32) When Miss Morgan arrives in Las Pasturas she is pictured as naive and afraid. Her first reaction to Las Pasturas is negative because, ironically, she feels the place is too paradisiacal. For example, the appearance of the Whiteside house is so perfect that it is almost unnatural. As Steinbeck says,

The walk up to the door did not reassure her, for the path lay between tight little flower beds hedged in with clipped box, seemingly planted with the admonition, "Now grow and multiply, but don't grow too high, nor multiply too greatly, and above all things, keep out of this path!" There was a hand on those flowers, a guiding and a correcting hand (The Pastures of Heaven, p.132).

Yet Molly is reassured by John Whiteside's casual conversation that Las Pasturas need not be feared. Her interview with Whiteside is unusual, since in it Steinbeck uses stream of consciousness technique as Molly reflects back on her past, telling only part of it to Whiteside but revealing the bulk of her troubled childhood to the reader. She begins with the unusual love/hate relationship that she had with her mother who used Molly and her two brothers as substitutes for the love she never received from her drunken lazy husband. Molly's attachment to her father is, of course, founded in duality. In reality, he is a wastrel and cannot be depended on, yet when he does come home, his buoyant personality and his generous imaginative gifts endear him to the children.

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(32)Fontenrose, p.26.

Like Junius Maltby, George Morgan invents his fantasy adventures to provide excitement and joy for the children, an excitement that can't be matched in the real world. He is reminiscent of Johnnie Nolan, Francie's father in Betty Smith's A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.

Despite his irresponsible actions, Morgan is still the idol of his young daughter. For example, even the mongrel puppy that he gives her is special, and after its untimely death, Mr. Morgan is able to turn the grim facts of harsh reality into a pleasant story (The Pastures of Heaven, p.140). In his make-believe world, Molly finds an Eden that even Las Pasturas cannot rival. In fact, it seems to Molly that her father's problems become nonexistent through his fantasy, and his very weaknesses are converted into strengths. "Their father was a glad argonaut, a silver knight. Virtue and Courage and Beauty--he wore a coat of them" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.141.). I have no doubt that these references to these lines is intended to draw the reader's attention to Morgan's resemblance to the earlier hero of Steinbeck's first novel, Cup of Gold, as well as Steinbeck's hero from his youth, King Arthur. Yet despite associations of fantastical heroes with Morgan, ever so often the real world creeps in and affects Molly's reactions to her father. Eventually, she reveals that one time when her father went away, he never came back. As a result, the family, especially Molly, had to struggle with the possible reality of his death or the fantasy



of his continued hopeful adventures.

As Steinbeck explores the new school teacher's true feelings about her father by using italic print, Molly replies to Whiteside's actual queries about her background in short clipped crisp sentences. What she says and what she thinks are shown to be opposites. Her thoughts reveal that even when she was no longer a child and was studying to become a teacher, her dream about her father continued. He was still her knight in shining armor, ready to whisk her away to a land of continuous excitement and adventure. Consequently, Molly refuses to believe in his death because it would mean the end of her hopeful fantasies.

Yet her arrival in Las Pasturas changes her. As Steinbeck describes it, "All of a sudden she found she was a queen, an important person, in social demand" (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.144-145). She even is attracted to the Whiteside son, Bill, and shares with him her dreams about her father. Like the Munroes, though, Bill Whiteside inadvertently destroys the dream by calling George an irresponsible cuss. It is obvious he does not understand the intermingling of good and evil which George represents and which Molly cherishes. Later Molly realizes the unattractiveness of Bill is based on his lack of understanding of what George Morgan was like. She compares her father with the bandit Vasquez, who was rumored to have built a cabin high on the hill that edged the valley. Because of this parallel Molly also decides to have an

adventure by seeing that cabin. The experience is one of excitement as she envisions Vasquez looking down on Las Pasturas. Its Edenic picture,

The orchards lay in dark green squares; the grain was yellow, and the hills behind, a light brown washed with lavender. Among the farms the roads twisted and curled, avoiding a field, looping around a huge tree, half circling a hill flank (The Pastures of Heaven, p.148).

suggests it is unreal and fantastic but at the same time real and filled with beauty. In her vision Molly also sees Vasquez himself as a heroic and impressive man rather than a simple thief. In fact, Vasquez had her father's gay face.

On the other hand, Bill's perceptions of the cabin and the man are just the opposite. The cabin is just an old woodshed, a funny old box, while Vasquez is not a hero at all. Bill states,

"...He started in stealing sheep and horses and ended up robbing stages. He had to kill a few people to do it. It seems to me, Molly, we ought to teach people to hate robbers, not worship them" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.149).

Obviously he, like Molly, sees only one end of the spectrum, and although he observes the intertwining of good with evil, he is not willing to accept it; rather, he prefers to see the extreme of good. Neither character can cope with the confusing paradox that they are coexistent.

Once again it is Bert Munroe who provides the chilling death to the vision of hope and perfection and the search for absolutes. At a school board meeting, Munroe mentions a bum he has picked up near Salinas and who has become his farm

hand. He says he isn't worth a cent but that he "can take the littlest thing he's seen and make a fine story of it" and he always has some kind of present in his pocket for his kid Manny (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.150-151). Molly, of course, senses the similarities to her father, but she dreads confronting the man. In fact, not seeing him becomes such an obsession that it causes her to be physically ill. Eventually she asks Whiteside to let her give up her position so that she will be able to get away from Las Pasturas and not believe that her father is the drunken farm hand at the Munroes. Like the other residents in the five previous episodes, she finds the potential Eden to be flawed. Once she recognizes this fact, her fantasy is broken, and she must accept man's fallen condition. Consequently, she also feels bound to reject the valley as her home.

Chapter IX of The Pastures of Heaven examines the life and actions of Raymond Banks, whose farm, unlike the Maltbys', is one of the most admired in Las Pasturas. A further contrast which links this tale to the previous stories is outlined by Fontenrose. He notes that Molly is "an imaginative person who pleaded sickness and suddenly gave up a position that she liked because she did not want to identify with a suffering man." Banks, on the other hand, is described as "an unimaginative person who also pleaded sickness and suddenly gave up a custom he liked for just the opposite reason, because he identified himself with suffering men."(33)

Another similarity unrecognized by Fontenrose is the fact that both Molly and Banks find enjoyment and happiness in that which others consider "bad" or "evil." In fact, the paradox that results from their so-called evil interest reaffirms the essential moral ambiguity of a fallen world. It is ironic that despite their questionable motives for good, each also envisions a potential Paradise in Las Pasturas; Molly in finding a new home and Banks in developing his farm. For example, immaculate perfection is the image of the Banks' property, and this is emphasized by the symbolic whiteness of his chickens, ducks and chicken houses and by the square of regulated alfalfa and kale that he plants (The Pastures of Heaven, p.155). Banks seems to ward off evil, and even the red-tailed hawk that considers preying on his chickens is afraid of him. His flower garden is also an Eden. Steinbeck describes it as "calendulas and big African marigolds and cosmos as high as trees; and, behind the house, there was the only rose garden worthy the name in the valley of the Pastures of Heaven" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.156). It echoes the regulated beauty of the Van Deventer home and contrasts the natural beauty of the Maltby farm.

Yet even in the new definition of "physical" perfection, there is moral ambiguity. Outward appearances are not accurate, and Steinbeck's belief in duality is once again

stressed. Indeed, the physical description of Raymond which follows indicates his dual nature as well. His hair and eyebrows are fair, but his eyes are as black as soot. Similarly "his mouth was full lipped and jovial and completely at odds with his long and villainously beaked nose" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.157). His actions were also evidence of the ambiguity of his nature. Steinbeck says he abused children with heavy ferocity, but that he kept them laughing all the time and that he had a way of flinging them about, of wrestling and mauling them that was caressing and delightful (The Pastures of Heaven, p.157).

Other paradoxes abound, but Steinbeck chooses to dwell on Banks' preoccupation with killing. First Steinbeck portrays his humane execution of a rooster, and his interest in quick and painless death, but later the author also examines Banks' "unusual" interest in attending human executions at San Quentin Prison. The narrator points out that Banks does not revel in the death but in the excitement and submerged hysteria of the event. Like a later character, Mac in "The Vigilante," Banks finds that approaching death "aroused his dramatic sense and moved him to a thrilling emotion. The hanging itself was not the important part; it was the sharp, keen air of the whole proceeding that impressed him. It was a holy emotion that nothing else in his life approached" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.161). Yet Steinbeck does not see the act as morbid or evil. Banks' interest is

merely a grey area, a strange intermingling of suffering and pleasure. No strain of cruelty or any gloating over suffering brings him to the gallows. It is simply that here he can share the throbbing nerves of other men. "It made him feel alive; he seemed to be living more acutely than at other times" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.162). This is further evidence of duality since through the death of criminals his own life becomes more vibrant and sensitive.

Again the Munroes are involved in the destruction of a questionable Eden. When Bert Munroe discovers Banks' treks to San Quentin, he is filled with interest and foreboding. But he is upset when he finds the stereotyped picture he has painted of the man turns out to be defective. He can not understand Banks' strange mixture. As Steinbeck writes,

Bert was disillusioned, and at the same time a little disgusted. The very health and heartiness of Raymond seemed incongruous and strangely obscene. The paradox of his good nature and his love for children was unseemly (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.162-163).

For the simplistic Bert, the acceptance of such a paradox is unthinkable, and at the next opportunity he resolves to prove it wrong. Therefore he confronts Banks at his next backyard barbeque with his analysis of his "obscene" interest, hoping to help Banks see the incongruity of his actions and the "evil" that Munroe feels is inherent in them. However, the "bad" in Bert also surfaces as he expresses his revulsion at Banks' actions. In fact, he finds his voice acting without his volition as he requests permission to join Banks on his

next excursion to San Quentin. Later he is stunned and made ill by his speech. He discovers that, like Banks, he too finds pleasure in pain. "The choked feeling of illness was becoming a strange panting congestion of desire" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.167). It's as though Bert has a strange feeling of gladness in his "evil" action. Again, moral ambiguity is being stressed, and ironically, Munroe's interest is, in fact, more morbid than Banks'. He is nervous and extremely irritable as a result of his unexplained curiosity. Eventually he asks to be excused from his commitment, saying that he is scared he couldn't get it out of his head afterwards (The Pastures of Heaven, p.171).

Munroe then proceeds to explain to Banks the reason he cannot eat chicken. It involves the cruel death of a Rhode Island Red during his youth. His dream of its death reoccurs, and he fears that some terrible mistake of the human hanging might cause the same reaction now. His fears, of course, infect Banks, who up to that moment, believed that the executions weren't terrible. In fact, to him they were merely an enjoyable pastime; he did not see moral or immoral choices in his action. But after Munroe's words, Banks is filled with anger and sickness. When he returns home, he searches for an excuse to break his date with the warden. Eventually he and his wife settle on sending him an invitation to Las Pasturas where an animal barbecue will be substituted for a human hanging. As a result of Munroe's speech, Banks finds his good

feelings about "evil" are destroyed, and he is forced to see the world from the limited perspective of Bert Munroe, whose world must be black and white rather than grey.

The story of Pat Humbert which follows relates how yet another respected citizen will fall victim to the Munroe curse. Like Molly Morgan, Humbert has difficulty dealing with the past. Especially painful are his ancient parents whose negative outlook on youth has shaped Pat's adolescence. In typical counterpoint duality, the Humbert home is not at all the Eden of the Banks' episode. Instead it contains "a locked parlor, cold and awful as doom, and a hot stuffy sitting room always smelling of pungent salves and potent medicines" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.178). Fontenrose further notes that Banks was "a gregarious man who enjoyed the company of others but liked the sight of death. However when he realized what dying meant, he turned away from death." Humbert, on the other hand, is Banks' double in reverse since he is "a lonely man who hates the dead and enjoys the sight of life; but on the point of realizing life, he turns away from it."(34)

The house still contains the odor of death since Pat's parents have died within a month of each other. Steinbeck's description of its coldness includes the parlor which is kept locked except during the monthly cleaning. In this parlor is a green carpet which ironically has never seen the sun, a huge

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(34)Fontenrose, p.26.



Bible, seemingly unopened, and a tight bouquet of fake everlasting flowers. Even the picture of the dead Elaine in the room and the decorations of stuffed orioles suggest death rather than life. Consequently, this portrait of the Pastures of Heaven is hardly idyllic. In fact, the house seems to keep Pat captive despite his good intentions and the good will of his neighbors. Before their deaths Pat has been mystified by the duality of his parents and why they continued to want to live despite their deathlike state. Now their ghosts seem to haunt him and demand actions when he returns to the house. It is not surprising that he tries to escape the deadening influence by lighting a lamp and by moving his bed from the black and dreary bedroom to the brighter, warmer kitchen. Eventually he partially rejects the old life by refusing to light the parlor and by rebelling against the expectations of the ghostly voices. As Steinbeck states, "He had locked up two thin old ghosts, but he had not taken away their power to trouble him" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.185).

Instead of the loneliness and isolation of his past, Pat seeks out the company of others as he attempts to destroy the dark forces and create new and positive ones. However, he never becomes a part of any group he joined. For Steinbeck again, a dichotomy between right and wrong is present, and Humbert is trapped between them. He struggles to be the "good" person, but the "bad" of his past still influences him. Steinbeck describes his plight thus: "He tried with little

success to forget the terrible rooms on the other side of the door" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.187).

Eventually he is like his parents, or like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner; he is trapped with life in death, and death in life. In the beginning, his house follows his example, moldering in neglect. But suddenly a symbolic white rose bush springs up and covers the house, and a new Eden begins to sprout. Initially Pat takes no notice of this occurrence, and such a lack of interest is also true of Pat's relationship with the Munroes, until Pat begins to see Bert's daughter Mae as the antidote for the poison of his loneliness.

Again it is a slight comment by a member of the Munroes that destroys Pat's potential for new life. Mae comments on the beauty of the rose bush and suggests that the inside of the house must be as beautiful. When Pat overhears the comment, he is determined to prove her prediction true, even though just the opposite is the fact. Eventually Pat envisions Mae as his companion in such a house, and he redecorates the dark gloomy surroundings with her fellowship in mind. Steinbeck's description of his destruction of the old dingy furnishings suggests that they encompass the "evil" he is trying to exorcise from his soul. The purging fire destroys all the dead symbolic furnishings of the room, and the cleansing water renews the inner walls. Opposites abound in this section as Steinbeck portrays Pat's choice to shape his life by positive rather than negative acts. Secretly Pat

refurbishes the house all the while planning in his heart to share it with Mae. His Eden will be complete - a perfect home and a perfect wife, even though his savings would be completely depleted.

After several weeks of waiting, Pat's courage finally allows him to confront the Munroes and invite Mae to see the house. Ironically, however, she has just become engaged to Bill Whiteside, and all Humbert receives for his toil and trouble is an invitation to help with the wedding. Sadly, his plans and potential happiness are destroyed, and his new Eden becomes empty and meaningless. The Pastures of Heaven is no longer his paradise, for "evil" has conquered. Eventually Pat chooses to stay in the barn, fearing that the fate of his parents might become his own fate. Once more an episode illustrates that the intermingling of good and evil is not allowed to exist. Steinbeck seems to suggest that even if the former is chosen, eventually the latter will choke it out and destroy it. No matter how determined man is to preserve his Edens, his human nature precludes perfection and encourages death, destruction and despair. As Calvin says, "Men labor in vain to find in the human will some good quality properly belonging to it."(35)

Steinbeck ends his novel with the story of the Patriarchs of Las Pasturas, the Whitesides. Again there is a

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(35) Calvin, Vol. I, ch. V., p.288.

contrast to the previous episode. Fontenrose states that "Pat Humbert, uneducated and without family feeling, builds a Vermont house for a particular woman and abandons it when he fails to get her." Conversely, Richard Whiteside, "educated and endowed with a strong family feeling, builds a New England house for a wife before he has a particular woman in mind, and both he and his son continue to live in this house after their hopes of abundant progeny are disappointed." (36) As the earliest settler, Richard Whiteside has seen the valley as his promised land, a land to build a dynasty on that would rival the Athenians and the Aztecs.(37) Upon arriving at Las Pasturas, he sees an omen which he interprets as the final indication that this is the site where he will establish his family heritage. His vision is of a Camelot, a paradisiacal white house with a veranda and a trim garden. Similarly, his concept of his family is large and idyllic, and his goal is a perfect valley populated by his descendants. As he says to his neighbors,

"There will be a great many Whitesides born here, and a great many will die here. Properly cared for, the house will last five hundred years...I'm building a family and a family seat that will survive not forever, but for several centuries at least. It pleases me, when I build this house, to know that my descendants will walk on its floors, that children whose great grandfathers aren't conceived will be born in it" (The Pastures of Heaven, pp.204-205).

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(36)Fontenrose, p.26.

(37)See Peterson, p.101.

For a while, at least, the dream is continued, but early on Steinbeck suggests that its perfection is not only madness but also unattainable (The Pastures of Heaven, p.205). Nevertheless, the house is built, and Richard proceeds to complete the pastoral setting by planting orchards and preparing the land for seed. In addition, he keeps a little band of sheep nibbling on the grass on the hillside behind the house.

His next step, like that of Pat Humbert, is to find a wife and start a family, both of which he accomplishes in very short order. Alicia Whiteside's pregnancy is symbolized by a bronze copy of Michelangelo's David. To the Whitesides, it stands for the perfection of art by the Italian Renaissance, and prefigures the perfection of their own son. As Richard sees it, the curse of his New England ancestors has been removed. No longer will there be an only child syndrome in his family. The house, like his line, will prosper and grow in good.

However, even in the midst of these positive events, Steinbeck foreshadows the potential evil that threatens the house. The original ancestral house in the East had burned down, indicating the end of a dynasty. Similarly, as Whiteside finishes his speech of hope to his wife, an ember rolls out of the hearth and threatens Richard's mansion, "the new soul, the first native of the new race" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.210).

I believe that it is significant that when Richard's son is born he is named John instead of David, for he is not destined to found the dynasty similar to the Biblical one established by the son of Jesse. Indeed, childbirth for Alicia is so difficult that she almost dies, and the doctor warns Richard not to have any more children. The house seems quiet and dead, but shortly thereafter, when Alicia assures Richard they will have a large family, it seems teeming with life, despite the doctor's warning.

Perfection seems to flourish and again Steinbeck symbolizes it with the color white.

The house was the symbol of the family--roomy, luxurious for that day, warm, hospitable and white. Its size gave an impression of substance, but it was the white paint, often renewed and washed, that placed it over the other houses of the valley as surely as a Rhine castle is placed over its village (The Pastures of Heaven, p.214).

However, the gift of fertility and childbearing are not part of the Whiteside destiny. The second child dies, and Alicia becomes an invalid. After this tragedy, a key conversation repeats itself between Richard and Alicia. It involves the question, Are you content? Extended perhaps, it suggests man's frustrations at his own limitation and his constant quest for perfectibility despite his realization that it will never be obtained.

Although Richard replies that he is content, it is evident that his dreams have just moved down a generation to his son. Eventually the perfection as embodied in the

classics and his knowledge of them will be passed down to his child.

"Everything mankind is capable of is recorded in these three books. The love and chicanery, the stupid dishonesty, the short-sightedness and bravery, nobility and sadness of the race. You may judge the future by these books, John, for nothing can happen which has not happened and been recorded in these books" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.218).

But even in his reading, Richard does not see that the reason for the greatness of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon was that they showed that men with dual personalities could be fearful yet brave, sad yet happy, stupid yet wise. Instead, Richard sees them as perfection and insists that he can build his dynasty on their insight and worth. As his son grows, his learning and appreciation of such great literature will be a joy to Richard.

However, John's personality is not as decisive as his father's. Although he loves the old house, he is "less stern, less convinced of everything. Faced with an argument to decide, he was too prone to find endless ramifications on both sides" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.220). Thus it is unlikely that the hope of Richard Whiteside will be fulfilled by his son. Unlike his father in his aloofness, John becomes gregarious, influenced by his wife, Willa. Their existence, unlike Pat Humbert's in the previous tale, centers on the interior and the furnishings of the house - decorating the rooms in a pastoral setting of deer, Swiss alpine climbers and mountain goats. These are all steel engravings designed to

last, but unlike the everlasting flowers of Pat Humbert's parents, they signify a positive attitude toward a new Eden where peace and knowledge will be combined.

Eventually, John's only frustration is similar to his father's, a lack of children. This problem, however, is not solved until he has been married eight years. Like his father before him, the birth of a son motivates John to seek an even better "Eden" for the boy by paying more attention to his farm. He, too, expects his son to be just like him in his desires and likes, but sadly, Bill is not interested in either a dynasty or a knowledge of the past. As Willa says, "...he's not stupid. In some ways he's harder and brighter than you are. He isn't your kind, John, and you might just as well know it now as later" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.226). Instead, Bill is practical, sharp in a business sense. Since he is not a Puritan like his father, John suggests "Bill is a throwback of some kind of a pirate maybe," but he still suggests that the Whiteside blood will return in the next generation (The Pastures of Heaven, p.227). Once again Steinbeck reiterates America's dual heritage - religious and God-fearing as well as rapacious and greedy.

Naturally Steinbeck must weave the Munroes, the so-called destructive force, into this story as well. Therefore it is not surprising that Bert is drawn to John Whiteside as the type of person he would like to associate with and emulate. Eventually the interaction of the two



families results in the attraction of the children - Mae Munroe and Bill Whiteside. When Bill announces his impending marriage to Mae he "made it sound like bad news" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.228), and in typical dual irony, it is, especially for John Whiteside. The worst revelation is John's discovery that Bill and Mae plan to live in Monterey and that instead of tending the farm, Bill plans to be a partner in the Ford agency. He is moving away from the country to the city, and from the gracious life of Las Pasturas to the money grabbing existence of Monterey.

John persists in his dream despite Bill's determination. "He'll come back," he says (The Pastures of Heaven, p.231). But after the wedding, his prediction falters, and with his son gone, John again begins to concentrate on his house and lands as a possibility for perfection. Once again the Munroe interference continues as John discusses "how he has let the place go" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.232). Bert's suggestion is to burn off the brush that threatens the paradisiacal nature of the Whitesides and to provide a new pasturage for the spring. After a mild rain and with favorable wind conditions, Munroe and his son proceed to help in the task. At one point they are able to stop the sparks from accidentally reaching the house and setting it afire and eventually the brush patch is burned off.

Along with success comes failure, though, since a random spark does get to the basement where it ignites coal oil and

eventually ravages the interior with fire. Surprisingly, John does not try to save anything. Instead he resigns himself to taking a room with Bill in Monterey. Thus Steinbeck evicts even the most solid respectable citizen from Las Pasturas.

The epilogue or Chapter XII is designed to parallel the Spanish corporal in the first chapter and to provide a framework to mirror the fantasies and dreams of the outside world when contrasted with the reality of the little valley. It depicts six individuals taking a tour of the Monterey peninsula. In fact, perhaps the passengers on the sight-seeing bus gave Steinbeck an idea for his later allegory, The Wayward Bus. In any case, their reaction to Las Pasturas is similar to that of the Spanish corporal.

Each sees in it his own definition of Eden, unaware that it is not exempt from the human condition, that it too is flawed by the fall. For the business man the valley is a vision of riches and wealth. "Some day there'll be big houses in that valley, stone houses and gardens, golf links and big gates and iron work" (The Pastures of Heaven, p.240). If he had the money, he would buy the property and subdivide it.

The young newlyweds also like the peacefulness of Las Pasturas. But ambitions and expectations of friends draw them away from the dream possibility. They rationalize that they must face responsibility, rather than escape it (The Pastures of Heaven, p.241). Similarly, the young priest considers the potentials of a parish in Las Pasturas, but the idyllic vision

of nothing dirty or violent, of quiet love, is dispelled with a realization that this kind of ministry would be no ministry at all. The true Christian must be in the world but not of the world. As Calvin says, "[Man may] duly profit by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, estimated in itself, is restless, troubled, in numberless ways wretched and plainly in no respect happy; that what are estimated its blessings are uncertain, fleeting, vain and vitiated by a great admixture of evil."(38)

Finally, the old man sees the potential of Las Pasturas for reflection, to make something out of his past and to understand the meaning of existence. Even the driver envies the residents the peace and quiet of Las Pasturas. However, symbolically, the town is located at the end of the tour, and the sight-seeing bus must return from its mountaintop experience in Eden toward the setting sun, the death-in-life of the real world.

Steinbeck seems to say in the framework as he does in the body of the novel that evil conquers, that mankind's dreams will constantly be destroyed by the encroachment of a sin-sick world. From vagrants and low-life to the prestige settlers of Las Pasturas, no one is exempt from the dark side of existence and that dark side, at least at this point in Steinbeck's career, is inevitably triumphant. It is this

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(38) Calvin, Vol. II, ch. IX, p.26.

fact, the capitulation of man to evil, that marks the continuing attempt of Steinbeck to portray the dilemma of moral ambiguity. Affected characters may try to maintain a balance between good/evil, between dream fantasies and realities, but they should not be shocked if they are rudely awakened by the dominance of the latter. The bleak world of Las Pasturas leaves the reader skeptical about all Edens. The facts seem to indicate they are merely forgeries, lapsed gardens that frustrate and defeat the rebuilders. As Fontenrose notes,

Thus the curse affected every resident, whatever his virtues, faults, or condition... In The Pastures the comprehensive oracle, expressed in the curse, runs counter to individual oracles of particular stories...But Steinbeck inverts the myth...[Similarly in the story of Tularecito]...a changeling does not want his true nature discovered; but Tularecito wanted to quit mankind and go home.(39)

Thus human flaws caused by man's duality are shown to be the center of the novel. However, Fontenrose fails to point out that although the Munroes receive primary blame, the other residents of the valley also have some responsibility for their own fate. As Peterson summarizes Steinbeck's emphasis he concludes that it is man's inability

to adapt his vision to natural and human factors. Steinbeck does not deny the value of the dream...He does, however, suggest that men of imagination and feeling have to be aware of the forces which threaten them. They will have to accept the cruel twists of fate and overcome the human mediocrity and idiocy which exist in ominous

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(39)Fontenrose, pp.26-27.

abundance in the world if they are to succeed in fulfilling their visions of the harmony and peace which the tourists mistakenly believe exist in the Pastures of Heaven.(40)

Similarly Richard Astro in his analysis of Pastures states "that while man's highest function on earth may be to break through to an understanding of the cosmic whole and to act to benefit the social order, his fallibility often undermines his potential greatness."(41)

I believe that Astro's analysis here is helpful in seeing the inherent pessimism of Steinbeck's early writing. Although he presents the dilemma of a morally ambiguous world where grey areas outnumber the black and white polarities or absolutes, in each of his portrayals there is a rather sad admission that man is ultimately at the mercy of a whimsical world whose fluctuating value systems will toss him carelessly about. No matter what man's own system consists of, this unpredictable force will eventually overcome and will ultimately work toward the destruction of man's dream state of perfection. Thus, the fallen Eden cannot be restored, no matter how hard man attempts to recreate it.

Progress - man's illusory hope of regaining his original sin-free nature and thus obtaining peace within himself and with God - is shown to have dual qualities. It is also good and bad, positive and detrimental, at the same time. However,

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(40)Peterson, pp.101-102.

(41) Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (Minneapolis, 1973), p.96-97.

the key to the role of The Pastures of Heaven in Steinbeck's canon does not only lie in its presentation of duality but rather in Steinbeck's reaction to it. Each of the major characters in the episodes seem to be beaten down by the disintegration of the absolutes in their life. As they discover the paradoxical state of living in a state of "moral" flux they begin to change their positive idealistic attitudes about themselves and about their potential for good in a new Eden. If it is impossible to determine right and wrong, man might as well throw up his hands in defeat. Many, including Wicks, Maltby, Miss Morgan, and the Lopez sisters, are so depressed they leave their potential paradise in despair. Others, like Humbert and Whiteside, regress and accept isolation and rejection as the price they must pay for envisioning their possible rebirth as a new creature in a new Eden.

In short, I believe that Steinbeck in his early years attempts to paint a purely "as is" picture of the little valley. At this point in his career, Steinbeck must have felt that truly realistic fiction demanded the bleak outlook painted by the failure of any of the residents to "break through" the dilemma of man's duality and to persist in the struggle to find their place in the whole of society.

I believe that the details provided in this chapter suggest that early critics who ignored the work as a non-cohesive collection of stories or who downplayed it as a

relatively minor contribution were both wrong. So were those who categorized it as unrelated or merely tangential to the later themes that Steinbeck utilized. Instead, The Pastures of Heaven is a refinement of one of the earliest themes of Steinbeck - moral ambiguity. This theme, spliced with people and places he was familiar with instead of the fantastical pirates of Cup of Gold, made Steinbeck not only more relevant in a moral sense but also more readable and believable. The deft combinations of the stories of the valley residents are carefully connected by the link of the Munroes and suggest Steinbeck's increased sensitivity to providing an adequate framework for his writing. In addition, Steinbeck's increased knowledge of his craft is also demonstrated in the careful imagery of nature and animals that undergirds the novel and in his careful choice of word pictures that attract and hold the reader.

I believe The Pastures of Heaven deserves a less obscure place in Steinbeck's list of accomplishments. Its taut realism and its thematic emphasis moves it beyond the natural comparison with Sherwood Anderson's episodic novel, Winesburg, Ohio. Though they are similar since they are technically tied together by an individual character who interacts with residents of a small town, the complexity of Pastures raises its stature above the Anderson novel. The book was a risk both structurally and thematically, and Steinbeck was rightfully dismayed at the lack of understanding it received.

When approached from the perspective of moral ambiguity, I believe its true significance is evident. It is a skillful presentation of the paradox of human life and at this point anyway, a reflection of Steinbeck's rather bleak outlook on mankind's potential to overcome his moral dilemma and to live a life populated with questionable decisions based on ambiguous, rather than absolute, facts.



### CHAPTER III

REINFORCEMENT FROM HOPE, RESOLUTION FROM DESPAIR:

#### THE HOLLOW TRUCE OF THE LONG VALLEY

The Long Valley, published in 1939, has been described by Joseph Fontenrose as unlike The Pastures of Heaven because its stories are not interrelated and because they seem to be strung together on a slender unifying thread.(1) One critic, Brian Barbour, even goes so far as to condemn the collection as a "mass of confusion by an awkward apprentice with an erratic artistic sense." Labeling some stories as curiously lacking in power and the whole lacking a structural unity, Barbour then goes on to suggest that Steinbeck never wrote more short stories because the form was so demanding. Consequently, since Steinbeck lacked the exacting scrutiny required for a short story's effect, Barbour contends that his weaknesses were more obvious in this genre. Eventually, he concludes that Steinbeck's production incorporates several

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(1) Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York, 1963), p.59.

hollow notes into what should be intricate music, a fact which indicates his inferior status as a craftsman.(2)

One other similarity in the critical reactions is the fact that most analysts are puzzled by the inclusion of some of the stories, especially "St. Katy, the Virgin," "The Breakfast," and "The Raid." Attempting to see the title as an indicator of locale, the critics are frustrated by the refusal of some of the stories to fit their imposed structure. However, it seems that Steinbeck, who took pride in his meticulous structuring and planning, would hardly throw together the book without some intentional linkage.

It is also unlikely that so many stories in the collection are as flawed and inferior as Barbour would have us believe. In order to truly see their worth, I believe it is necessary to approach them from a different perspective, to come, as it were, without advance expectations or prejudices and let the individual tales speak for themselves. The fact that strikes me first is the attempt of some major critics to see the title as a unifying element. They suggest that here is another California valley, a typical Steinbeck scene that symbolically brings together divergent tales. However, such an approach is immediately frustrating since the physical area so described does not encompass all the stories in the

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(2) Brian Barbour, "Steinbeck as a Short Story Writer," in Steinbeck's "The Long Valley": A Study Guide, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (New York, 1976), p.114,117,125,126.

collection. However, I believe that the title in other respects is indeed an important indicator of the unity of the collection.

Perhaps the valley is the symbolical valley of the shadow of death, through which all men must walk, but I believe it is more likely that it is a symbol of the frustrating status of mankind when confronted with good and evil, which appear as opposite ranges of mountains that enclose the dwelling place of man. In this explanation, the valley is a constant part of man's life, not just a momentary challenge before death. Man is continuously, from birth to death, in the long valley, caught between polar opposites of right and wrong. This symbolism, suggested primarily in the second episode of the novella, The Red Pony, would account for the recurring echoes in the collection of the frustration and despair of men who recognize the moral ambiguity of their choices. In fact, I believe that the key to the relationship of the tales is the fact that each includes a portrait of the fall, and a resultant recognition that mankind's position now includes the paradoxical intermingling of good and evil and the inability to separate the two as black and white.

While Fontenrose wishes us to believe that it is Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking which dominates the collection, that each story is merely something that happened, there definitely is more to The Long Valley than that. These stories are again depressing evidence of man's depravity and

his inability to cause good to triumph over evil. In each of the short stories the reader is moved by the pathos engendered by the characters as each attempts to cope with the newly realized dilemma of his own similar plight as a human being, struggling to discover absolutes and unwilling to admit they don't exist.

As Reloy Garcia notes,

There is both a common context, the garden, and a common theme as well, which derives from the context and amplifies it. This theme is the brutal initiation into the world of disappointment, loneliness, manhood, knowledge, evil, and death; in short, the world of man... This movement is from disappointment through evil and death to acceptance of the natural order. Over and against the painful awareness each initiation induces, character after character attempts to create a static child's garden which walls the chaotic world of man. In every case, the garden is subject to the coercive, but necessary influences of adulthood and consequent knowledge.(3)

This fallen Eden is indeed the central focus of the book, as throughout the collection, man must cope with moral ambiguity and his own dual nature.

The volume begins with "The Chrysanthemums" which has been classified by some critics as a story whose basic theme is a woman's frustration and her latent or dormant sexuality.(4) Although the story does not appear to be about morality, man's dual nature and his struggle to decide what is

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(3)Reloy Garcia, p.26.

(4)See Charles A. Sweet, Jr. "Ms. Elisa Allen and Steinbeck's 'The Chrysanthemums'", Modern Fiction Studies, XX (1974), p.210 and Mordecai Marcus "The Lost Dream of Sex and Childbirth in 'The Chrysanthemums'", Modern Fiction Studies, XI (1965), p.54.

right from what is wrong is central to the story line. For example, the early physical description of the fog is the first indicator of man's unclear situation. The fog is a figure of isolation and loneliness in Elisa Allen's surroundings while the fields appear bathed in sunshine although there is no sunshine in December. Similarly, the air is cold but at the same time tender.(5)

As Steinbeck introduces the major character, Elisa Allen, she is planting her flower garden, the chrysanthemums of the title. As Mordecai Marcus has noted, Steinbeck's description centers on her masculine qualities. Although she is eager, mature and handsome, she is also pictured as powerful, hard and determined as she goes about her task. The details of her gardening costume block her feminine figure and suggest her strength and her farming ability, both masculine traits. As she observes her husband discuss a sale with two men in business suits, there is a strong suggestion of jealousy about the inequality of their respective positions. Elisa, despite her talents, has gone unrecognized in a man's world.

The natural question arises: Is her relegation to a set sexual role a positive or a negative? Should absolutes of any kind exist in a world where they frustrate and confine.

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(5)John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, (New York, 1938), p.9. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parentheses within the text of this paper.

Although several critics have noted Steinbeck's juxtaposition of parallel situations in Henry Allen's successful ownership of a ranch and Elisa Allen's work in her garden,(6) no one has yet called attention to the ironic fact that, though the worlds of Henry and Elisa are similar, they do not offer the same reward. Elisa's garden, though a microcosm of the ranch, is not an Eden. It is a flawed paradise due to stereotypes and absolutes imposed by society.

Elisa's husband, Henry, is pictured in a dominant male role. At times, he too represents an absolute, but his power enables him to avoid being stifled by his role in society. Like the practical Bill Whiteside in Pastures of Heaven, he seems to have no time for anything that is aesthetic or beautiful (feminine). He is merely interested in business and refuses to interact with his wife on the basis of feelings, preferring logic.

Thus Elisa's Eden or Paradise must be composed of her garden and her chrysanthemums rather than her marriage, since Henry seems unlikely to realize either Elisa's ability or her wish for equality. Ironically, although he does acknowledge her gift with growing things, he only jokes about her involvement in the production of crops. Otherwise, she is on an inferior plane. Yet, Elisa continues to assert her worth. This supposed perfection of the male is being questioned and

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(6)See Sweet, p.211.

Elisa is asserting her own positive nature.

Her eyes sharpened. "Maybe I could do it, too. I've a gift with things, all right. My mother had it. She could stick anything in the ground and make it grow. She said it was having planters' hands that knew how to do it."(7)

Yet despite this assertion, Henry continues to stereotype Elisa's homebody, peaceful interests as less important than his own more acquisitive violent ones. This mistake, of course, is due to his failure to recognize the essential duality of all of humanity. In Henry's mind Elisa is not allowed to be anything less than an absolute, a stereotype of the "perfect" wife. She must not have an interest in fights; her chrysanthemums are to be her ordered and perfect life that will bear no interference from the "evil" world of men.(8)

Shortly after Elisa and Henry plan a trip to town to celebrate his business deal, Elisa is confronted with a repairman riding in an old prairie schooner. Their encounter starts out with an innocent comment about a dog, but a little later the salesman expands the conversation by hinting that he is in need of directions. As the conversation proceeds, Elisa is drawn to the tinker's exciting freedom, which is in direct contrast to her own isolation and loneliness. Again Steinbeck pairs a character with a double or an opposite. However, a short time later, the salesman nearly destroys ELISA'S

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(7)John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, (New York, 1938), p.11.

(8)Marcus, p.55.

sympathetic and empathetic response to him by making a pitch for business. Reacting to his obvious attitude of male dominance, Elisa's attitude immediately changes, as she now associates the salesman with her husband and becomes resistant and irritable at his questions, which suggest her basic inferiority based on sexual roles.

Noting her change in attitude and tone of voice, the salesman cleverly shifts the conversation to Elisa's flowers, hoping to regain her previous positive attitude. Describing the flowers imaginatively as "a puff of colored smoke," he impresses her with his willingness to be creative and feeling (feminine) and to express himself in non-masculine terms. As a result, he wins back Elisa's trust, but not before Elisa has emphasized duality again by describing the scent of the chrysanthemums as a good bitter smell. Like the later good rotten smell of Lee's apple cider in East of Eden, the chrysanthemums partake of the same paradox as humanity. They, too, possess duality, intermingled good and evil.

Elisa, impressed by the man's interest in both her femininity and her fertility as exemplified in her flowers, offers to give him some cuttings for the lady down the road. In addition, there is significance in Elisa's gentle placement of the pot of chrysanthemums in the tinker's arms; the flowers function as a surrogate child who will hopefully attain the freedom clearly denied to Elisa herself.(9) Although Elisa is unwilling to see her own sterility, Steinbeck seems to be



suggesting here that if there can be no change for the older generation, at least there is potential for the future generation to realize the futility of absolutes and work toward an acceptance of mankind's inherent duality. The reader's attention is drawn to this thematic emphasis as Elisa describes the contradictory techniques needed to produce the best blooms of her chrysanthemums. After giving detailed directions for proper planting, Elisa continues by describing the process of debudding in order to generate larger blooms. Again, duality is stressed, for in order to obtain a larger good, something must be destroyed. "When you're picking off the buds you don't want, they [hands] never make a mistake. They're with the plant. They know. They never make a mistake. When you're like that you can't do anything wrong," says Elisa (The Long Valley, pp.17-18). Although Elisa's unfulfilled sexuality and her desire for motherhood has been stressed by several critics commenting on this section, I believe that her suggestion that right and wrong occur by instinct is just as important as a key interpretative phrase in this passage. In fact, later Elisa draws a very similar comparison between the dark night and the bright stars. Despite the fact that the stars are sharp-pointed, there is quiet in their appearance in the sky. This duality is also mirrored in the ecstasy Elisa experiences in watching them.

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(9) See Marcus, p.56.

They are hot and sharp and lovely at the same time (The Long Valley, p.18).

At this point, Steinbeck's portrayal of Elisa shifts the emphasis to a submissive feminine role as he describes her crouched low like a fawning dog. Suddenly Elisa realizes the impropriety of her previous sexual-laden comments, and she draws back from the conversation and suggests that she does have some work for the tinker. The reader, of course, is struck by the intermingling of good and bad in this sudden shift in character. In true ambiguity, her action suggests weakness, but she is actually a very strong and talented individual. Although Elisa believes she has similar talents to both her husband and the traveling repairman, her role has been governed by expectations and traditions and will not allow her to show that side of her personality. Her strength and expertise are not acknowledged in a male dominated society. Again duality is present as Steinbeck foreshadows the shifting morality of men.

Locked in by sexual stereotypes, both males are unable to see either their own weakness or the potential of women. Instead, they use Elisa for their own ends, and the potmender especially attempts to profit from her innocent naivete. Steinbeck reveals the duplicity of the potman when Elisa reminds him to keep the sand damp around the chrysanthemums. His momentary lack of recognition of her frame of reference is missed by Elisa but not by the reader. The reader recognizes

that if Elisa persists in her dream of perfection--where men can be trusted to be truthful and honest and to treat women as equals--she will be rudely disappointed. Mankind has two natures, and the evil one usually dominates. However, Elisa does maintain her hopeful reaction in a typical refusal to see the obvious, to recognize her inability to attain perfection. As the potmender leaves, she says, "That's a bright direction. There's a glowing there" (The Long Valley, p.20). If she cannot change her structural role by escaping from the isolation inherent in the farm, at least her child (her chrysanthemums) may have a chance. It may reach the expanded world of freedom which the potman symbolizes.(10)

As she continues the conversation, Elisa reveals her basic dissatisfaction with the unequal role she must play in society. She states, "It must be nice. It must be very nice. I wish women could do such things." When the tinker suggests that such a life isn't right for a woman, she replies, "How do you know? How can you tell? You might be surprised to have a rival sometime. I can sharpen scissors, too, and I can beat the dents out of little pots. I could show you what a woman might do."(The Long Valley, p.19). But her belief in herself soon withers as the wagon pulls away and she recognizes that her actions with the man are tantamount to sin. The guilt of wanting to be equal invades her psyche. Suddenly she is

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(10)See Marcus, p.56.

pulled back to reality, and she returns to the absolutes of her isolated life. Consequently, she indulges in an intense primitive cleansing rite that will purify her before she goes out with her husband. But again the Edenic dream is shattered as the duplicity of the tradesman which was suggested earlier comes to fruition. The tinker is revealed to be like the "gray fog, which seems like a band of yellow sunshine" (The Long Valley, p.21); his actions are deceiving and they trick Elisa, just as the outward appearances of nature often deceive mankind.

After her bath, Elisa's strength as an individual seems to return. Again she shifts her self image, now truly believing and reveling in her own strength. She exalts in her ability to transcend the evil of the world through her paradisiacal garden, which she will pass on to others interested in the bright side of life and willing to allow flexibility rather than rigid absolutes. When she sees Henry, she is disappointed that he calls her appearance "nice," but she is pleased when he recognizes her inherent strength and emerging happiness. "I am strong," she boasts. "I never knew before how strong" (The Long Valley, p.22). Yet, when the chrysanthemums are discovered discarded along the side of the road, Elisa's mood once more changes abruptly. She recognizes that despite his outer facade of interest and gentleness, the tradesman, like her husband, Henry, is basically materialistic and "bad" rather than aesthetically minded and good. The

stereotype world of absolutes has returned to blot out the tenuous balance of ambiguity.

For Elisa, the caravan of excitement and freedom has once again passed her by, this time with sorrow and regret. Although she concentrates on her night out with Henry, in reality she is denying her real feelings and pretending that marriage, husbandry, and entertainment are part of a naturally fulfilling cycle.(11) Elisa's next request to Henry indicates that her dreams of perfection and equality have been demolished. Instead they have been replaced by a wish to deaden perception (having wine) and to punish and hurt insensitive men (seeing the fights).

Once again she lashes out at the absolutes created by stereotyped sexual roles. There are only two options open for Elisa, and again they are opposites on the spectrum. Sadly, no balance can be maintained. Either Elisa must completely ignore the happening, or she must exact hateful punishment vicariously.(12) Suddenly her powerful strong feelings of some two pages earlier disintegrates into weak crying. Like an old woman, she learns to accept the fact that although evil and good are often intermingled, the resulting tension seldom lasts. Despite the ambiguity of these values, the pressure of society wrongly invades and makes arbitrary decisions which do not allow fluctuation and grey areas. Ultimately, one wins

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(11)See Marcus, p.57.

(12)See Marcus, p.57.

out and the polarity of absolutes, of right and wrong, returns. Again, the early pessimism of Steinbeck concludes that the dark side of man's being generally conquers his attempts to see the truth. Instead of seeing duality, he is influenced by his rigid Puritan heritage and the words of Calvin, who said, "No believer ever performed one work which could escape condemnation...the act being vitiated and polluted by sin and [thus] deprived of its merit."(13)

The narrative of the "White Quail" which follows is reminiscent of Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter." Mary Teller, like Beatrice, has immersed herself in her garden, and though it is regulated in deliberate patterns and planted with ordinary flowers, it is every bit as poisonous as Rappaccini's. Again, absolute laws are set up against freedom, as the patterned structure of Mary's creation is contrasted by the wild bushes, trees, and grasses which border the area. In fact, it is impossible to know for sure whether the regulated unnatural surroundings created by Mary are superior and better than the natural free environment which is not subject to man's interference.

However, Mary's perception of her garden is that control is right. She has tentatively planned and constructed it, even considered what potential husband would be able to live

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(13) John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981), Vol. II, ch. XIV, p.81.

with it. The garden becomes almost human, and Mary communicates with it in the same way Beatrice does in the Hawthorne story. Thus, an artificial Eden is created, complete with a cement pool and a variety of flowering plants. But love is not present. In fact, Mary sees Harry, the husband she has chosen in this "brave new world," without passion; in her crazed mind, that emotion is reserved only for her garden, suggesting a corrupt, rather than an ideal, world. After her marriage, Mary creates a meticulous and efficient plan for her garden's construction. Her thoroughness impresses Harry so much that he excludes himself from the process as an unworthy participant. As he says, "You see your own mind coming out in the garden. You do it all your own way" (The Long Valley, p.29). Thus Mary's passion for perfection is not flawed either by Harry's input or by flowers that don't fit in.

The fact that perfection is Mary's goal is reinforced by the fact that she sees the garden as non-changing. "If one bush dies, we'll put another one like it in the same place." (The Long Valley, p.30). However, I believe that this arbitrary maintenance of the status-quo suggests evil as well as perfection. In fact, there is a pervading sense of bad in such regulation. Eventually, the garden becomes a part of Mary, rooting out her essential humanity as it does to Beatrice. In fact, a fear develops that if the garden should change it would be like a part of herself being torn out.

The theme of moral ambiguity resurfaces as Mary's actions in the garden inspire a polar reaction in Harry; he too experiences love and fear simultaneously. Harry states,

"Well, you're kind of untouchable. There's an inscrutability about you. Probably you don't even know it yourself. You're kind of like your own garden--fixed, and just so. I'm afraid to move around. I might disturb some of your plants" (The Long Valley, p.30).

In her search for perfection, Mary seems to have become an automaton, and the resulting lack of emotion toward her husband is frightening, rather than admirable to him.

Following Mary's lead, Harry continues to associate his wife with the garden. "She was so pretty, cool and perfect" (The Long Valley, p.31), that she reminded him of its perfection. Contrariwise, for Mary the plants become people, and she speaks of them as human beings. In the ritual of feeding and growth of the flowers, her desire for perfection is accompanied by another ritual, the killing of slugs and snails that threaten the blooms. Here, perfection is seen as a perversion of the "natural" order, since the natural process of survival of the fittest is artificially changed. Instead, the creeping "evil" that unites Mary and Harry is a mighty hunt of destruction from which they return "laughing happily."

A similar reaction is seen when Mary suspects a cat might be lingering in her garden and causing the absence of buds. Her solution is violent--to put out poisoned fish, to kill to maintain perfection. Again the paradox of man's dual nature is emphasized. Is one species to be protected and



maintained at the expense of another? Must the evil of destruction accompany any attempt at restoring paradise? A milder approach is suggested by Harry who recommends an air gun, which will merely scare the cat, not destroy it.

At this point, light and dark images pervade the story as Mary describes the dark thickets of the hills. "That's the enemy," Mary said one time. "That's the world that wants to get in, all rough and tangled and unkempt. But it can't get in because the fuchsias won't let it" (The Long Valley, p.32). In contrast to this threatening "natural" environment of bushes and trees, the birds are associated with humans. They are accustomed to living in the wild, but they relish coming to the Edenic garden because it affords water and an "artificial" yet desirable peace (The Long Valley, p.32).

At this point, Harry still does not understand his wife. In fact, he is troubled by his inability to cope with someone so sure of herself. However, Mary is satisfied with this unnatural barrier that surrounds the garden. In fact, shortly thereafter she discovers her actual essence--the fact that there are "two me's" (The Long Valley, p.33). Symbolically, she undergoes a separation and with her essence or soul is able to observe how others see her. The real Mary is revealed as different from what is observed and what is. However, she is unwilling to share this discovery with Harry. She fears he would ruin her perception with his input, but she also is unwilling to admit her dual nature and her depravity.

Here Steinbeck again stresses man's duality in Mary's physical appearance as she describes her attire as careless but neat and pretty. Paradoxically her character and personality are also divided--seeking perfection and yet forced to use imperfection and evil to attain it. Her garden shears embody the same dilemma. They have been exposed to the elements and rust is forming on them. The parallel, of course, is that man's exposure to "evil" also causes his essence to rust - to decay from original perfection.

The emphasis of the story suddenly shifts to Harry and his more masculine, more materialistic, perception of life. Like the practical, materialistic tinker of "The Chrysanthemums," Harry Teller too is basically crass and money-grubbing rather than aesthetic and appreciative like his wife Mary. Consequently, at least one critic has read the entire story as Steinbeck's comment on the plight of the artist and the dilemma of subordinating life to art. In this view, Mary as the artist creates a garden or work of art which demands absolutes - an adherence to a private vision which ultimately forces the destruction of her basic humanity.(14)

Although this interpretation has some validity, it does not seem to be the primary concern of the work. Harry, like Mary, is also shown to have dualistic traits of morality.

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(14) Arthur Simpson, "The White Quail," in Steinbeck's 'The Long Valley': A Study Guide, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), pp.11-15.

This is not the simplistic story of a domineering woman and a hen-pecked husband. Both marriage partners are flawed and present evidence of the dilemma of a sin-sick world. For example, Harry is slow to confess that his company utilizes loans in an unfair way. Like Ethan Allen Hawley in Steinbeck's last novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, Harry takes advantage of people while they are down. Yet his reaction to Mary's criticism about his actions is one of guilt and embarrassment. As he compares himself to Mary, he also finds himself unable to see her flaws. His supposed "imperfections" are contrasted with his wife's supposed "infinite potential for good."

Again Mary shuts herself off from Harry by locking him out and avoiding human contact. Instead, she reflects on the day. Like Cathy in East of Eden, she lets her eyes become accustomed to the dark and dares to visualize Harry's occasional mistakes of judgment. She condemns the excitement Harry finds in the normal events of life, in the joy of having an animal, in expressing and sharing emotions. She realizes that such dreams are in conflict with the gentle, almost stagnant picture of her garden. A dog would "do things on the plants of her garden, or even dig in her flower beds, and, worst of all, a dog would keep the birds away from the pool" (The Long Valley, p.36). The thought of such destruction makes Mary physically ill. In the flights of her imagination it is as if the potential destruction had really happened.

Eventually, Harry is again ashamed by his "evil" wish for companionship, and gives up his desire for a dog.

As the story continues, Steinbeck again relies on light/dark imagery, since the really-garden-time, a sacred hour, occurs when the sun goes behind the hill. Again, the light/dark symbolism suggests that the "perfect" garden may be dark and deformed, rather than an Edenic model. Mary's concentration on the garden becomes increasingly unhealthy as she revels in the absolutely right fuchsias which discourage the natural habitat, the bushy and scrubby untrimmed trees on the other side. She fantasizes again on her duality as she observes several quail approaching her pond to drink. Suddenly, a white quail, unordinary to be sure, is observed, and Mary immediately associates it with herself. It is ecstasy, and yet ironically it is something sad, always something sad. It is disappointment and loss coupled with happiness and joy. She even compares her ambiguous feelings to several other events that raised similar contrasting emotions: the gifts which were disappointments, the candy from Italy which was to be seen, not eaten, and the death of her father, each of which filled her with paradoxical ecstasy and sorrow.

However, these paradoxical contradictions are suppressed by Mary when the center of her, her heart (the white quail), is threatened by a gray cat. Mary screams hysterically at the thought of an intruder in her pastoral garden and makes Harry

promise to use the air gun to prevent its further appearance. She also relates to Harry the secret of the white quail.

Unfortunately, Harry is skeptical. He has never heard of such a phenomenon and dismisses the quail as an albino. Yet Mary insists in identifying with the white quail and defining it as the "secret me that no one can ever get at, the me that's way inside" (The Long Valley, p.41). Its pure and unusual appearance brings to mind the perfection Mary is struggling to restore to her fallen Eden. Ultimately, however, her attempt is made futile by Harry's abhorrence of the unnatural garden and bird which continue to separate him from his wife. Instead of shooting the cat with the air gun, Harry destroys the white quail by shooting it in the head. Appropriately, the destruction of "perfection" occurs while the room is still dusky but while the garden glows and the tops of the lawn oaks are afire with sunshine. Again, the light/dark imagery suggests the inevitability of duality and the bleak picture that hoped-for perfection, whether fantasized or conscientiously worked at, will fall victim to evil, for as Harry states, "I didn't mean to kill it...What a dirty skunk, to kill a thing she loved so much" (The Long Valley, p.42).

Yet on closer examination, even Mary's so-called perfection is flawed, for in her determination to artificially produce it in nature, she had lost a parallel perfection in human relationships. Such a concentration on the agentic

selfish principle, as Bakan defines it, has resulted in the destruction of community. Through her insensitivity to "real" relationships, Mary succeeds in creating a perfect garden like Rappaccini, but the resulting perfection brings evil outcomes and the destruction of the characters' dreams, rather than a realization of their most intimate desires. As Henry laments at the close of the story, "I'm lonely...Oh, Lord, I'm so lonely!" (The Long Valley, p.42).

"Flight," the third story in The Long Valley, has been widely anthologized and has received perhaps the most critical attention of Steinbeck's shorter works of fiction. Most critics have emphasized the animal imagery of the story and have pointed out Steinbeck's obvious interest in Pepe's initiation into manhood and his subsequent retrogression into primitive animalistic traits as he faces the harsh world of reality. However, only one critic, Hilton Anderson, has noted the eventual positive nature of Pepe's final actions and the possible moral implications of his journey. In his essay, "Steinbeck's Flight," Anderson points out Pepe's striking similarities to a snake and how

Only after drawing a "shaky cross" on his breast, seemingly exorcising the serpent qualities, [is] he able to get to his feet and stand erect to receive the death bullet from his pursuers.(15)

Anderson also argues,

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(15)Hilton Anderson, "Steinbeck's 'Flight,'" The Explicator, XXVIII (1969-70),113.

And by using the snake-like traits to represent and point out evil in man (brought about by the serpent in the Garden of Eden), and especially by having Pepe exorcise himself of the serpent-evil, Steinbeck has given "Flight" a religious significance that seems to have been overlooked by most interpreters of the story.(16)

yet each of the critical comments acquires added perspective if "Flight" is perceived as depicting the moral dilemma of man - entrapped simultaneously by the good yet evil world.

The setting of "Flight" is by no means an Eden. The shack, the farm building, the brown reefs and the hissing white waters are all images of foreboding, omens which indicate the harsh evil side of the real world. Similarly, the lifestyle of the Torres is by no means easy. Death has plagued them in the demise of their father, who tripped over a stone and landed on a rattlesnake. Symbolically bitten in the heart by the oldest of evil omens, the father has departed the gray world of his farm.

His son, Pepe, is the central figure of the short story and, like his father, he too has a heritage of duality and moral ambiguity. The physical description of Pepe is Steinbeck's first indication of the two natures which war within him.

Pepe had sharp Indian cheek bones and an eagle nose, but his mouth was as sweet and shapely as a girl's mouth, and his chin was fragile and chiseled (The Long Valley, p.46).

Ironically, old enough to attain manhood, his unmanly actions

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(16)Anderson, pp.112-113.

as well as his childish appearance belie him. Here too duality is evident. Pepe is loose, gangling and lazy, and his self-image as the strong eagle is contrasted with another description of Pepe which associates him with a lazy cow or coyote who somehow subverts the strain of fineness and bravery which is inherent but presently dormant in Pepe. Pepe's belief that he must rely on things and possessions to make him a man is immediately suggested by his attitude toward the switchblade which has been left him by his father as his only inheritance. Here, too, symbolically we see the heritage of fallen man is death and violence.

Ironically, this affection for the knife will prove his undoing. The "good" feeling of a father's gift will be transformed to Pepe's detriment. This transformation is due largely to his lack of responsibility and his immaturity, both of which are indicated by the use of the knife as a toy. Steinbeck's repetition of the word "sheepishly" also indicates Pepe's tendency to be naive and stupid when it comes to serious matters. He possesses a dual nature - naive and innocent, yet experienced and inherently inclined to evil. Although he is still, in his mother's words, a "peanut," his inclinations are to assert his "human" nature in society's eyes and thus prove his manhood.

After Mama's reprimand about the knife game and questioning of his maturity and manhood, Pepe receives a great duty and trust, a trip alone to Monterey to procure medicine



and salt. Pepe's immediate reaction is pride and gratitude, but at the same time he again reveals his immaturity in his lack of sense about the true nature of manhood. In this childlike nature, he seems to view his life in simplistic blacks and whites rather than a gray area of complexity. For him, maturity and respect are gained by wearing a hatband and a green handkerchief. His youthfulness is also indicated by his innocent adherence to religion and his devotion to the traditions of the church. The harsh reality of real men and their actions has not yet invaded his world. Although Pepe continues to protest his manhood has arrived, Mama alone sees the intermingling of his youth and adult nature. In short, he has yet to see the complexity of his fellow men, and he seems unable to understand that good and evil intertwine in society.

To Mama, Pepe is still a foolish chicken. As she talks to Emilio, she repeats her philosophy on manhood. "A boy gets to be a man when a man is needed. Remember this thing. I have known boys forty years old because there was no need for a man" (The Long Valley, p.50). It is impossible to predict when each individual will recognize his Adamic inheritance from the fall. Indeed, in naivete he may deny it completely, but when man's true nature is called on, the natural sense of depravity will resurface, and manhood, with all its violent and sinful implications, will be revealed. The physical description of the next few lines suggest the inevitability of time's passage, but it also announces its fluctuation and its

duality. Like nature, man also moves in cycles and does not rely on absolutes.

In the section of the story which follows, Steinbeck wisely uses flashback to describe Pepe's journey to Monterey and his adventures there. As Pepe recounts his own version of his fate, the reader sees the changes which have occurred. It is a different Pepe who returns home; he is tired and patient but very firm. While in Monterey, he has again relied on the outward symbols of manhood, and has overindulged in wine, and suddenly he has lashed out and killed someone with the knife. As Pepe describes the event, evil again seems to have occurred almost randomly by instinct. With its arrival, true manhood and understanding also begin to appear. The latent evil in Pepe has surfaced, and the resulting actions have created a polar opposite to the innocent child who left home. Like Robin in Hawthorne's My Kinsman, Major Molineaux, or the title character in Young Goodman Brown, the protagonist returns home a sadder but wiser man. Pepe's eyes, once laughing and bashful, now are sharp/bright and purposeful (The Long Valley, p.51). His rite of passage has begun.

However, the ensuing flight of the title can be approached in two ways by Pepe. It can merely become a fearful running away, or it can approach the soaring of eagles in displaying man's courage in the face of certain destruction. The choice is Pepe's alone. Initially, the first definition is selected. Pepe will flee, will not accept

responsibility for his actions, will still rely on the outward accoutrements, the last vestiges of humanity, to save him. As he rides of toward the little canyon, he is caught in the inextricable dilemma of choosing a fearful life or a proud death. He may accept his fallen world or continue to flee his recognition of his imperfection and the perils which face him as a result of his actions. Steinbeck's use of light and darkness again suggest the vagueness of his choice. "Moonlight and daylight fought with each other, and the two warring qualities made it difficult to see" (The Long Valley, p.54).

After Pepe's departure, the sacrificed son is mourned by his mother and his siblings. The inevitable has occurred - the initiation to evil and death has transformed Pepe from boy to man, and from naivete to experience. Symbolically, his innocence is already destroyed; his physical death can only follow.

Pepe is literally trapped by the mountains, isolated by canyon walls, cut off from other human existence. He is traveling in the long valley of the title and is forced to Bakan's agency rather than communion. Yet his journey up the canyon is more than a literal ride. It is a continuation of the rite of passage. Previously his animal instinct, his inclination for evil, was not developed, but suddenly he is able to physically sense the threat of impending danger. In fact, he attempts to deny his animal traits as an indication

of inferiority and lack of manly maturity. Animal-like, pepe's nostrils quiver a little. He tenses in the saddle, loads his rifle and keeps it half-cocked. This action serves as an ironic symbol of his inability to be fully initiated into manhood, his tendency to ignore reason or only partially acknowledge it. As he moves further and further away from civilization, Pepe is aware that he also isolates himself from the other side of his personality, his good side, his positive pole. His surroundings indicate that his potential for good has been overcome as the soft black earth symbolically changes to light tan broken rocks.

The animals in the episode are again important, mostly because they, too, are in flight. Lizards scamper away in the brush, and a little gray rabbit skitters over stone. Predatory hawks hover overhead, offering no warning of when a potential attack will begin. Like the dark watcher, perhaps a God figure who observes Pepe's flight from the high cliffs, (The Long Valley, p.58), the animals observe Pepe without feeling or emotion.

After negotiating the pass there is an oasis of sorts, a flat of green clustered with oak trees. But behind it, the ominous final mountain rises, "desolate with dead rocks and starving little black bushes" (The Long Valley, p.59). Pepe's stop at the little spring is his last contact with the positive side of life. Although doves and quail come from the hills to the spring and suggest a positive, Steinbeck also

notes that the evening light has washed the eastern ridge and that the valley is darkening. It becomes symbolically the valley of death, and the preying wildcat Pepe observes near the spring only foreshadows the stalking of Pepe himself. Although Pepe prevents the slaughter of the innocent birds, he cannot protect himself. In the the middle of the night, he awakens to danger and as his journey continues, his losses mount. First he leaves his hat at the camp; then his horse is shot from under him.

Animal-like, he scrambles on all fours up the hill. Symbolically, he notices two types of birds - an eagle, soaring high in light, flying to the blazing sun, and buzzards, circling downward toward the carrion of the horse. Again, the duality of choice is posed. Which flight - up or down - will Pepe select? The result of the choice will, of course, be ambiguous, since neither choice offers an affirmation that it is the right selection.

Still another problem confronts Pepe when he is wounded by the freak splinter of shattered granite. But the rite of passage is not yet completed. Pepe eventually must exorcise the absolute of manhood that he persists in believing. He must confront and accept his true essence. He momentarily finds solace in a cave, but with increasingly animal image, slithers on his stomach into the brush. Unlike his father, though, he avoids being bitten by an aroused rattlesnake. Yet Pepe's defeat is imminent. It can only be delayed, not

avoided.

It is evident that Pepe's state is deteriorating because he becomes more primitive and destructive in every passing moment. He even strikes out at a lizard and smashes it for no apparent reason. Like the animal threatened with extinction or interference, he strikes back to protect himself. Eventually, he begins to discard the elements of his civilization, his father's coat, and sets out with the rifle toward the top of the ridge. He recognizes that his heritage is not imposed civilized behavior, but rather a harsh animalistic urge for survival. His wound is now infected, and his chances of escape are lessened. Still, he manages to find both water and sleep, and to withstand the threat of a mountain lion. However, he continues to lose the outward signs of his manhood that he has so valued as he forgets the rifle and finds that the big black knife is no longer in his pocket.

Again Steinbeck suggests moral ambiguity. Pepe is within a few yards of the top of the ridge, yet his struggle is futile. His hand and arm are infected by gangrene and when he reaches the top only another waterless and desolate canyon greets him. The setting is like some savage animal whose granite teeth stand out against the sky. Subsequently, Pepe's animal traits increase. A thick hissing comes from between his lips (The Long Valley, p.68), and he throws back his head and whines like a dog. Between his lips the tip of his black

tongue showed like a snake's. The hiss repeats itself on the final page of the story, but Pepe exorcises the evil with a shaky cross on his breast.

Finally he affirms the two sides of mankind by accepting both responsibility for his act and by taking the punishment. Here his flight really changes him into a man and affirms that he is something more than an animal. He soars rather than runs by accepting the fate of death. Steinbeck again paints a bleak picture of man's fate by suggesting that only through death can the jarring power of evil be defeated. Man cannot maintain the fine balance between good and evil so necessary to a maintaining of life. Instead, he mistakenly lives in a naive dream world or is converted to the evil primitive animalistic life style that characterizes most "mature" species of the race. Yet, when finally stripped down to what he brings with him from within himself, his own gifts, his own courage, Pepe eventually defeats his evil alter-ego and recognizes his potential as a man. The cost is significant. In order to transcend his fallen nature, nothing less than physical death is required. Here by conscious choice, Pepe accepts the fate meted out to Adam by God. Only after death is Pepe victorious. And undoubtedly most readers would question the price he must pay to attain self-realization and to discover his identity. Yet Steinbeck appears to believe that each man must give birth to himself; then die of complications. To be a man is to know death.

According to Steinbeck, the next story in the collection, "The Snake," was based on an actual personal experience of Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck's closest friend and a well-known resident of the Monterey peninsula. In his description of the actual event in The Log from The Sea of Cortez (pp.xxiii-xxiv), Steinbeck acknowledges that its meaning remained a mystery to him although he recognized its power and appeal.

Yet despite Steinbeck's unwillingness to categorize "The Snake" by assigning it a specific significance, critics were not so hesitant. Edmund Wilson commented that "This tendency on Steinbeck's part to animalize humanity is evidently one of the causes of his relative unsuccess at creating individual humans."(17) Obviously Wilson's concentration settled on the lady in black, whom he considered to be an inhuman freak.

Others noted deep psychological meanings and quoted Freud and Jung, but only Warren French came near the story's meaning when he stated that the central focus of the story was not so much the woman as "what she allows us to learn about another."(18) However, French's further comment that "The Snake" condemns "those who give free rein to irrational drives" and sympathizes "with those who seek scientific knowledge of the world they live in"(19) only serves to divert

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(17)Edmund Wilson, The Boys in the Back Room, pp.38,41.

(18)Warren French, p.82.

(19)Warren French,p.82.



attention from his important initial insight.

French's initial comment is on target. The mysterious woman does allow us insights into another. In fact, she helps us to understand the protagonist of the story. Like Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, who helps the reader see the true personality of the narrator Nick Carraway, the character of the woman serves as a mirror to Dr. Charles Phillips, the scientific researcher who was patterned after Ricketts. In exposing the doctor to this strange encounter, Steinbeck vividly portrays moral ambiguity. Through Phillips, who symbolizes all modern mankind, Steinbeck seems to suggest what outward appearance would deny: that mankind is still drawn toward primitive "evil" and mystical explanations of the universe despite his intent to progress toward "good" and success through science.

Dr. Phillips is presented as an Adamic figure, who as the original first man, has control of all the animals in an ironic prison-like Eden. Even the rattlesnakes recognize Adam (Phillips) and draw in their tongues as if not threatened by his presence. Unlike his predecessor, this Adam is scientifically oriented and believes that he can discover answers to the meaning of life through experiments. Once again there is an echo of Hawthorne and a remembrance of such characters as Aylmer, Rappaccini and Dr. Heidegger. These scientific trials are the forbidden fruit by which Phillips denies long-buried emotions and feelings, and instead, exults

knowledge. In fact, he has progressed from a perfect Adam to become his own God. His specimens can be tested, regulated and explained by using the scientific method, a method which requires Phillips to be uniformly unfeeling about his experiments. All his actions are head controlled, rather than heart controlled, and he is able to rationalize his "evil" experiments as justified by the potential "good" which may be realized.

For example, his starfish experiment requires random destruction of the ova in various stages of development. This casual extermination is justified as necessary for science, and Phillips proceeds to callously gas a cat as yet another indicator of his ability to separate feelings and emotions from his work. In each case, Phillips continues his experiments with little recognition or perception that his actions intermingle good and evil. He maintains that the prerequisites of death and destruction are sometimes necessities for gaining knowledge or insight. Maybe he has continued the original fall by maintaining that knowledge is all-important.

As the tale begins, Phillips appears to be fascinated by the nature of his job and anxious to get started with his task. As the reader watches his movement in the lab, he quickly senses that the doctor's efficient manner illustrates the duality of his personality. For example, he seems to care for the cat, as initially he pets it and treats it kindly;

however, the next moment he casually places it in a gas chamber. Similarly, after eating hurriedly, he proceeds to examine the starfish he has collected in true scientific curiosity; nonetheless, a few minutes later, he begins another sequence of death.

The appearance of the dark woman with black hair, black eyes and a dark suit begins a pattern of light and dark imagery which will later allow associations of the woman with both Eve/temptress and snake/devil. Such syncretic allegory allows Adam/Phillips to "see himself though darkly" in her later actions.

In the initial stage of the meeting, however, the Adamic figure is too busy elsewhere to notice the parallels. Ironically, he is stopped in the middle of his starfish experiment, which is totally dependent on an accurate time sequence. Although Phillips attempts to finish his work, he feels strange as the woman quietly and mysteriously watches him play God by artificially mixing the sperm and ova. Then just as quickly as he creates life, he prepares to destroy it by arresting the fertilization process in stages and by placing it on microscopic slides for biological study.

This exaltation of knowledge again downplays emotion, especially the dark emotion which the woman epitomizes. Thus Phillips is annoyed that when he scientifically explains the process, the woman is apparently uninterested in his terminology. Yet on another level, her strange manner is

intriguing, and Phillips finds himself as an observer rather than one observed.

Subsequently the doctor is drawn by her appearance, a repetition of the light/dark imagery. He notes the darkness of her eyes with no color line between the iris and the pupil, and he speculates that these abnormalities indicate a sub-human character. Yet, perhaps Phillips is merely sublimating the recognition of his own dark traits and is unwilling to admit the woman's "evil" exists in a normal human being like himself. The woman's sexual appeal is also emphasized as Phillips comments on her sensuality and is drawn to her despite his denial of physical attraction.

Since the so-called "good" starfish experiment draws no comment from the woman, Phillips is determined to gain her attention by displaying the dead cat. This ostentatious display reiterates Phillips' own preoccupation with death, but again he fails to see the "evil" and instead explains the embalming process and concentrates on the fact that the dead cat will be used to aid students in bloodstream dissection. Thus Steinbeck reintroduces the head/heart theme of Hawthorne and suggests that the search for knowledge at the expense of feeling is an all too frequent occurrence. The callousness and the unfeeling experimentation of man on his fellow man as epitomized in Hawthorne's Chillingworth and Aylmer must be seen in its true light. The costly balance of duality must be maintained. Neither extreme is a positive, and striving to

attain either is futile. Like Aylmer in "The Birthmark" and Dr. Heidegger in "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," Phillips has attempted to usurp the powers of God and to assert his perfectibility. Sadly, like the aforementioned characters, he is also observing man's limitations and depravity in his double image, the dark woman.

After another short moment of uneasiness, Phillips again becomes observer of the woman. He is nervous and upset by the inaction of her body and the haunting observance of her dark and dusky eyes. Perhaps for a second there is a brief recognition of her similarity to himself, but Phillips does not admit it.

When he finally finishes stage one of the starfish experiment, Phillips does begin a conversation with the lady. After reading Steinbeck's physical description of the woman and noting how often he associates her with reptilian qualities, the reader is not surprised that she is interested in a male rattlesnake. In fact, when Phillips identifies one, she noiselessly follows him to observe it. Her fascination with the snake is obvious, and almost immediately she offers to buy it. A contest of wills begins here between Phillips and the woman. Eventually, it is evident that the woman is interested in ownership rather than possession, and the eerie nature of her actions becomes clearer. Again sexual images emphasize the lust and sensual concerns of the woman, who seems to derive some type of sexual climax or ecstasy from

her dark observation of the snake. Yet despite her outward appearances and the vivid description of her obsessions, her actions are no worse than those of Phillips shown previously.

Meanwhile, Phillips' comments underscore the theme of moral ambiguity: "'Rattlesnakes are funny,' he said glibly. 'Nearly every generalization proves wrong. I don't like to say anything definite about rattlesnakes but yes, I can assure you, he's a male'" (The Long Valley, p.79). Paraphrased to express the thematic emphasis the section might read "Humans are unpredictable...You'd like to think you can categorize them like animals, but generalization often proves untenable, and ambiguity abounds." Thus Steinbeck implies that relative rather than definitive statements are best when analyzing human action.

Although the doctor still sees himself very positively, his duality is further exposed when the dark lady also reveals her fascination with death. However, she does not cloud her interests by attaching positive motivation to them as Phillips does. The bad simply is attractive, and symbolically she wishes to feed a white rat to the dusky snake to indicate the power of darkness over light. Phillips' reaction is abhorrence since he has already informed the woman the snake does not need to be fed. As a result, Phillips considers the action to be wanton sport, unwarranted and unjustified. As Steinbeck writes, "He hated people who made sport of natural processes. He was not a sportsman but a biologist. He could

kill a thousand animals for knowledge but not an insect for pleasure" (The Long Valley, p.80). Ironically, however, Phillips himself is guilty of what he hates. He is, however, able to rationalize and explain away his own fascination with death and the life process.

However, despite his revulsion, the hypnotic eyes of the woman persuade Phillips to let her have her wish. As a consequence, his attitude and perception of his own work begin to change.

He felt that it was profoundly wrong to put a rat into the cage, deeply sinful; and he didn't know why. Often he had put rats in the cage when someone or other had wanted to sell, but this desire tonight sickened him (The Long Valley, p.81).

After he has agreed to the feeding, Phillips vainly tries to make good out of bad and to find excuses for his actions. Emotion has returned to his life and with it, confusion. But his initial revulsion still persists, since he eventually suggests that another victim be substituted. This suggestion implies a sympathy for the rats and is contradictory to his earlier non-involvement in emotional matters. Here he states that he would rather place a cat in the cage because at least it would have an equal chance. It may be at this point that Steinbeck suggests good (Phillips' self recognition) will come of evil, (his succumbing to the temptation of the dark) the 'felix culpa' of Milton's Paradise Lost. In doing so, he is echoing and acknowledging with Milton the inseparability of good/evil in a fallen world.

But despite Phillips' evident modification of his beliefs, the woman/temptress prevails, and the innocent white rat is dropped in the feeding cage to be devoured by the snake. Phillips' sensitivity to its imminent death is again heightened. It appears to him as if the woman's body crouches and stiffens as she sighs. Again her animal lust is emphasized, and a sexual orgasm is implied. The rat, on the other hand, seems curiously unaware of its fate. Ironically, it is similar to the starfish and the cat.

Phillips, though, is still unwilling to interpret or see the woman's evil as his own; therefore, he proceeds to describe the attack in intellectual, rather than emotional, terms. Yet inwardly and subconsciously he recognizes the symbolic nature of this event. In the snake's destruction of the white rat, he is observing how "evil" swallows up "good" and how the two are strangely intermingled in man. Similarly, death is superimposed on life, demanding its end. He is fascinated by the inexplicable duality of man: "it was at once the most beautiful thing in the world and the most terrible thing in the world" (The Long Valley, p.83).

As the snake approaches the rat, Phillips goes back to observing the woman. It seems as though she is paralleling the actions of the snake. She weaves slightly as the snake stalks its prey, and Phillips is afraid to look at her as the snake unhinges its jaw and swallows the rat. The intense identification of the woman with the snake again has sexual



overtones, and it is apparent that Steinbeck views the primal sexual urges as evidence of man's depraved nature. Yet the doctor's intrigue with evil and death remains. Perhaps he averts his gaze because he senses his own tendency in the woman. Although he tries to justify the rat's sacrifice by asserting that its death was painless and quick, he cannot deny his fascination with the woman and with the rat's death. This is a part of his fallen nature - that he is at the same time entranced and yet repelled by perversion. The forces of science have been subjugated to evil, and the first sin of the first garden has been reenacted in a modern garden/laboratory.

Phillips' vicarious experiment with the woman ultimately causes the starfish ova data to be inaccurately reported. In disgust, Phillips destroys the contents of the petrie dishes and pours them in the sink. He returns the starfish to the water and stops the embalming process of the cat. It is as though his whole world has been called into question by this single happening. On the other hand, the woman, satisfied by the event, leaves and promises to return, but not before she orders Phillips not to take this snake's poison because "she wants him to have it." This statement also implies moral ambiguity since the extraction of evil/poison will be used to create a good antidote or serum. Steinbeck asserts in these final sentences that good and evil are mysteriously intertwined. Not unlike Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, Phillips is left stunned at the end of the story. He has seen

the two sides of man's character and subconsciously at least has observed that his own positive nature has identified and associated with a woman who is simultaneously his opposite yet also a part of him: innate evil stalking innate good.

As a result of the encounter, Phillips thinks of three potential acts: killing the snake, praying to and accepting a god, and refusing to see the woman ever again. Wisely, Steinbeck does not have him do any of these. The religious solution would of course be too pat and contrived, but it does serve to alert the reader to an underlying meaning of the story. The reader also recognizes that the other two options, while more simplistic, are really not solutions to Phillips' dilemma, and thus Phillips is left in indecision. The event is merely "something that happened" and the reader, like Phillips, is left free to interpret its significance and its meaning. The reader may choose to delve deep into its significance or to regard it as insignificant and inconsequential, no matter how puzzling it may seem.

The next story, "Breakfast," is considered a fragment and a similar rewritten expression appears in chapter 22 of The Grapes of Wrath. Warren French has called it "the slightest of stories in The Long Valley... nothing more than a sketch describing a family of cotton pickers who share their simple meal with a stranger."(20) Yet, although "Breakfast"

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(20)Warren French, p.81.

does not possess as much depth as other stories in this collection, it does illustrate the moral ambiguity theme well. The first person narrator is trying to discover what it was about "this thing" [the breakfast] that filled him with curious warm pleasure. The time of day is the first indication of duality as the early morning and its faintly colored light are contrasted to the black blue mountain and the pure night of the west.

The warm feelings spoken of in the first paragraph of the story are also contrasted by the physical cold that affects the narrator. A similar duality is suggested in the important encounter of the narrator with a tent family. The interaction begins with details that would suggest poverty and despair. Yet despite this aura there is hope and life - symbolized by the nursing baby and by the new clothes that have been purchased by the menfolk. Even the breakfast itself is an indication of a positive outlook brought about by twelve days of work. As Steinbeck's narrator describes it, "I was close now, and I could smell frying bacon and baking bread, the warmest, pleasantest odors I know" (The Long Valley, p.90). As Pascal Covici assesses the achievement of the story

How eloquently and with what understanding Steinbeck loves his people. His creative impulse is ever concerned with the interaction of his characters, their relationship to their immediate environment, the intuitive drive or circumstantial necessity which compels them to live together or apart. He understands their joys but he also knows their voids and aches and frustrations. His

characters are of the earth. They are lowly of spirit and they are also entirely human: their beings contain the greed and love and hatred shared by all mankind -- and like many of their fellow creatures they insist upon eating their daily bread and getting their glimpse of the moon.(21)

The coming day repeats Steinbeck's frequent use of light/dark imagery and represents a positive yoking of two opposites. The optimism is strong as Steinbeck writes, "We all ate quickly, frantically, and refilled our plates and ate quickly again until we were full and warm. The hot bitter coffee scalded our throats" (The Long Valley, p.92). However, the narrator still finds it difficult to explain. He is seemingly tongue-tied and unable to understand the great beauty he senses in the small group of migrants. As Claude Edmonde Magny notes,

it seems to the hero that the scene is pregnant with a profound poetry that he cannot elucidate, that he cannot communicate to the reader; and the writer, conscious of having failed in his mission - which is exactly that of expressing the inexpressible, of bringing to light and communicating the ineffable - ends his story with an awkward and embarrassed confession.(22)

In fact, when invited to join the family at work, the narrator surprisingly rejects them and it would seem, walks away from "the air blazing with light at the eastern skyline" (The Long Valley, p.92).

The narrator senses the positive elements of humanity

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(21)Pascal Covici, quoted in Robert Benton, "'Breakfast' I and II" in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's 'The Long Valley', ed. by Tetsumaro Hayashi (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), p.35.

(22)Claude Edmonde Magny, quoted in Benton, p.36.

which are inherent in these individuals, but is unable to harness or define it. He cannot accept the generosity and positivism of the migrant workers at this point, though in Steinbeck's later revision of this fragment for inclusion in The Grapes of Wrath, Tom Joad is able to accept the offer of help to find work. Instead, the event becomes a dilemma which is fraught with pain and which eventually results in rejection rather than acceptance. All the narrator of "Breakfast" can do is struggle to express his wordlessness. As in all the stories of The Long Valley, there is a profound mixture which influences the reader as Steinbeck gravitates to more positive stances than those which appeared in The Pastures of Heaven. The inherent pessimism about man which characterizes his early work is gradually giving way to a form of optimism. However, Steinbeck still refuses to commit himself to an overwhelming positivism. Instead he reserves his options.

"The Raid," like "Breakfast," also is a rough draft which was reworked into Steinbeck's earliest novel, In Dubious Battle. The novel's title obviously suggested the ambiguity Steinbeck was also portraying in the short story. Root and Dick, two union organizers who would become Mac and Jim in the novel, are pictured in the dark in a small California town. Root is afraid and inexperienced while Dick has been in the field longer and knows the ropes. Root especially is unsure of his action, and Steinbeck symbolically presents the ambiguity of their cause in the oil lamps which they bring

with them to conquer the darkness. In order to attain the good they seek [recognition of new principles and a rejection of an unjust System], they are prepared to experience the bad, a violent beating or even death. Again, Milton's "Felix culpa" or fortunate fall is emphasized; indeed the title of the novel is taken from the fight of Satan against the forces of God in Paradise Lost.

The three apple boxes Root and Dick confront in the abandoned building where they plan to hold their meeting symbolize their fallen state. They see their martyrdom and sacrifices to the cause as a positive even though Root himself is not totally convinced (The Long Valley, pp.97-98).

The dimming lamps and lack of oil (The Long Valley, p.100), may allude to the Biblical parable of the bridesmaids waiting for the Bridegroom, Christ. If so, then these bridesmaids are ill-prepared, even though they believe otherwise. They are very unsure of themselves and of the "light" they will bring to their fellow workers.(23) They are also short on matches, and the red and black portrait that symbolizes their cause is seen as "menacing in the dim light" (The Long Valley, p.101). Perhaps their cause is not as positive as they believe it is. The warning of an impending raid reinforces Christological imagery. As Dick says,

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(23)See Peter Lisca, "The Raid" and "In Dubious Battle" in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's 'The Long Valley', ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), p.44, for other parallels to early Christian thought.

referring to the poster, "Listen, kid,...I know you're scared. When you're scared, just take a look at him." He indicated the picture with his thumb. "He wasn't scared. Just remember about what he did" (The Long Valley, p.102). The figure becomes a symbol of support for their cause, an individual who is willing to risk anything, even life itself, rather than running. Thus, despite the warning of impending attack, Dick and Root surprisingly remain firm in their decision not to flee. They will be beaten and persecuted in order to provide an example of injustice.

Again Steinbeck has his characters rationalize the evil that will occur. "...if some one busts you, it isn't him that's doing it, it's the System. And it isn't you he's busting. He's taking a crack at the Principle" (The Long Valley, p.104). Ultimately, the "cause" supercedes the individual harm which may occur. Greater good will result from the wrong that Dick and Root endure. Root and Dick feel that even the literature they distribute has a purpose and may through some chance occurrence touch an outsider and move him to support the cause. Shortly after Dick's pep talk, however, Root's fear of physical harm becomes more intense and contrasts with Dick's courage. The reader even begins to feel that Root's sense of the futility of undergoing such bodily harm is justified and that Dick's devotion to the cause is perhaps insane, or at the least, a mindless physical sacrifice.

The raiders who burst in at this point are Steinbeck's portrayal of man's evil side. They fail to realize that, like Dick and Root, they are men, comrades, brothers. From their limited viewpoint, they see only the union's bad points - it is communistically inspired. What they fail to see is Root's Jesus echo that also appears in chapter 26 of The Grapes of Wrath. "It's all for you. We're doing it for you. All of it. You don't know what you're doing" (The Long Valley, p.107). Driven by their stereotyped views and their limited perspective, the raiders only see one side of the issue. They enjoy violence as much as Root and Dick enjoy suffering. After the beating, Root exclaims, "It didn't hurt, Dick. It was funny. I felt all full up--and good" (The Long Valley, p.108).

Like Phillips in "The Snake," he considers the parallels to religion, but ironically he says he does not wish to equate his feelings with that emotion. As he thinks about Jesus' words, "Forgive them because they don't know what they're doing," he reflects on the basic misunderstanding of the raiders. The resulting paraphrase echoes the Christ and reaffirms the raiders' mistaken ideas about Root's and Dick's purpose: "It's all for you. We're doing it for you. You don't know what you're doing." (The Long Valley, p. 107) Although the raiders have run their lives by absolutes, Root has broken through; unlike them, he finally understands the good that can result from evil.



"The Raid," according to Lisca, is eventually a success because it offers a practice ground for the detailed use of Christian allusions of In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath, but it also reveals a Steinbeck who is still hesitant to assert the potential of man's positive side to triumph over innate depravity. The individual who has insight is frustrated because of it, and those whom he attempts to convert persist in their belief in absolutes and their unwillingness to admit their own tendency to evil, preferring to label evil as good despite their use of bad to accomplish so-called "positives."

I believe that Steinbeck's "The Harness," like several other tales in this collection, is strongly influenced by Hawthorne. The Puritanical Peter Randall is much like Mr. Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil." Like Hooper's veil, Randall's harness is a physical symbol, to rein in and to confess his sinful nature. Each man recognizes his flawed humanity and is motivated to restrain his sinful urges or at least acknowledge them by an outward symbol.

However, despite the fact that he has attempted to cage the force of sin and to recognize his depravity, Peter appears grave and sorrowful, rather than happy and successful. His suppression of his sin is at best artificial. His sullen and mean streaks are superseded only by a regimen which requires restraint and probity, at least for a majority of the time. Furthermore, his action is insincere, since once a year,

Randall allows his animal nature to reign, indulging in sin and reveling in the evil of illicit sex in the city. However, he always makes up for his "sins" by the penance he is forced to do by his wife, Emma, upon his return. Each time he indulges his depravity, Emma feigns illness for a month or two afterwards, forcing Peter to work even harder upon his return.

As Fontenrose acknowledges, Randall turns out to be two persons. He appears "to have everything in life that he wants: a productive farm, comfortable house, adequate income, the respect of his neighbors, and a wife to whom he appears much attached. In fact, he also is shown as "a model of good order and sound management, a man in control of himself." (24) However, from the first paragraph, Steinbeck drops hints that the reality is different from the appearance. The harness merely restrains and hides the obvious tendency to evil; it does not cure it or transform it into good. Nevertheless, the Randalls are outwardly seen as upright individuals. In fact, the propriety of both Peter and Emma is further mirrored in their property. It is an ideal balance. It is a picture of Eden with fertile soil, gentle upland, a white farmhouse and beautiful flowers. The possessions of the Randalls also indicate their success while Peter's respectability is said to often influence his neighbors' actions. Perfection is their

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(24) Fontenrose, "The Harness," in A Study Guide to 'The Long Valley,' ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), p.47.

byword, but Steinbeck suggests this goal is maintained as a type of punishment rather than as a positive end in itself. Thus goodness is prompted by wrong motives, and Peter's guilt, rather than his love, prods him to care for his house as he cares for his wife, with awed respect motivated by what Peter classifies as deserving actions.

When Emma eventually dies after a long illness, it is as though a part of Peter has been ripped out, a part which is necessary to his continued existence. Even as Hawthorne's Hester Prynne could not continue living without her fateful "A" in The Scarlet Letter, or the minister without his black veil, Peter indicates his inability to exist without Emma, whose negative reactions are used as a scourge to elicit good from Peter. The motivation, of course, is tenuous and does not suggest positive change. Rather it implies a misunderstanding and a perversion of proper reasons for restraint from sin. Such action should not arise from guilt or fear, and such motivation will eventually crumble on close inspection. As Peter says, "It seemed like something snapped inside of me...Something like a suspender strap. It made me all come apart. I'm all right, now, though" (The Long Valley, p.117). Peter believes with Emma's death his so-called harness has been removed. He now is free to choose good, not obligated by her strict supervision.

Yet despite this new-found freedom, Peter still feels Emma's influence on his character. Although it is a positive

effect, the influence suggests a regulation which is domineering rather than freely imposed by choice. "It ought to please her that she made a good man of me. If I wasn't a good man when she wasn't here, that'd prove she did it all, wouldn't it? I was a good man, wasn't I, Ed?" (The Long Valley, pp.117-118). Here Peter acknowledges that Emma was like a harness that restrained him from evil. "I don't know how she got me to do things, but she did. She didn't seem to boss me, but she always made me do things" (The Long Valley, p.118). Yet, now that she is dead, Peter's other self is reasserting itself. Her removal is similar to removing the physical contraption that Peter wears to shape his posture and to make himself appear more upright in stature. His new-found freedom is "...like that harness coming off! I couldn't stand it. It was all over. I'm going to have to get used to going without that harness" (The Long Valley, p.118). Peter acknowledges that he will wear the belt and harness one more time, but after that he will burn them. Like the restrained Pat Humbert of The Pastures of Heaven, he will destroy the limiting past, and he will indulge in the evils which were forbidden him save for his once-a-year fling; all restraints will be cast aside. Even the mournful mantel clock will be replaced by one that ticks fast. The force held caged (The Long Valley, p.111), will be set free. The true nature of Peter, previously revealed only one week out of fifty-two, will supposedly be given free rein.

Peter also decides that the rigid farm acreage will be planted in beautiful sweet peas rather than the more mundane and practical crops. Peter will revel in his senses, will allow his sensual self to assert itself. Symbolically he asserts, "I'm going to slouch, Ed--slouch all over the place. I'm going to track dirt into the house. I'm going to get a big fat housekeeper--a big fat one from San Francisco. I'm going to have a bottle of brandy on the shelf all the time" (The Long Valley, p.121).

However, Peter follows through with only one of his proposals. Otherwise his former rigid schedule remains surprisingly the same. He appears unable to free himself from the spiritual harness although he burns the actual physical one. As his friend-Ed Chappell notes, "...hard work is the thing to kill sorrow. Peter Randall is getting up at three o'clock every morning. I can see the light in his kitchen window from my bedroom" (The Long Valley, p.124). But eventually his act of freedom from Emma, planting a crop of sweet peas, comes to be the envy of many of his neighbors, even though it is risky. When the crop matures, Peter's Edenic garden is even more jealously surveyed by his friends. "Busses brought the school children out to look at them. A group of men from a seed company spent all day looking at the vines and feeling the earth" (The Long Valley, p.125).

Almost everything else remains unchanged about Peter. He still immerses himself in his work and ignores human

contact. In fact, he is unable to enjoy the other sensual pleasures he so desires. Instead, he relegates himself to restrained living and to his yearly binge. As he explains it to Ed Chappell, "I just had to come up to the city. I'd'a busted if I hadn't come up and got some of the vinegar out of my system" (The Long Valley, pp.128-129). Sadly, he is unable to live with the duality of his personality and insists on the safety of a symbolic "harness," an Emma to reprimand him and keep him in line. Even after her death, she continues to influence him. At one point, Peter confesses, "She didn't die dead...She won't let me do things. She's worried me all year about those peas" (The Long Valley, p.129). He feels as though he is still literally forced to do things against his will.

As the story concludes, he plans to install the electric lights Emma always wanted. Symbolically, they will illuminate and overcome the darkness of his character. Steinbeck's technique is, according to Fontenrose, "to reverse the movement of the first part of the story." (25) Mankind, as exemplified in Randall, needs the spriritual harness of domination, the realization that an external, rather than an internal, force holds him in check. "Paradoxically the supposed reality revealed behind an appearance of

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(25) See Fontenrose, "The Harness" in A Study Guide to 'The Long Valley', ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), p.49.

respectability and rural content now seems to be itself appearance; and the old appearance of respectability looks more like reality."(26) Instead of accepting the duality of the world, Peter succumbs to the control of absolutes only occasionally deviating from the norm. He recognizes that he needs Emma, alive or dead, to govern him, to save him from sinking into the chaos of instinct and sensual appetite. True freedom is not obtained, and positive qualities (man's ability to overcome evil) are not allowed to dominate. Peter can free his shoulders from the harness, but not his soul. He willingly submits to the external governance of his nature. The desire for a cosmos or an ordered and perfect society is part of each man; but just as well he possesses an inclination toward chaos - the unordered, unstructured habitat of sin and evil.

Man's preoccupation with evil is also illustrated in "The Vigilante," where Steinbeck tries to show once again the strange intermingling of good and evil, which again begins with a picture of man in darkness. After participating in the lynching, Mike, the main character, describes his feelings in truly ambiguous terms. He is heavily weary, but it is "a dream-like weariness, a grey comfortable weariness" (The Long Valley, p.133). In fact, his ambiguous reaction is so obvious that he may be said to view the death of the Negro much as Dr.

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(26)Fontenrose, p.49.

Phillips views his destruction of the starfish and the cat in "The Snake." It is merely a "good job that will save the county a lot of money" (The Long Valley, p.134). The duplicity of the event is indicated in the following paragraph.

His brain told him this was a terrible and important affair, but his eyes and his feelings didn't agree. It was just ordinary (The Long Valley, p.134).

Mike's moral fiber has been influenced by the group, and he can hardly believe his actions of participation in the lynching. It is unreal, fantasy, nonexistent; as he says, "But now everything was dead, everything unreal" (The Long Valley, p.134). He even finds himself isolated from other members of his species. After the Negro's death he is ambivalent; he finds himself sympathetic for the poor offender and yet exultant in his participation in the black man's death. His positive side is seen when he urges other men not to burn the body "since that don't do no good." Good and evil are inextricably mingled in his mind at this point. As Franklin Court notes, he is unable to distinguish between illusion and reality.(27) The great and fantastic adventure of the lynching has become a let down and a dream-like weariness. Ironically, he repeats the phrase as he talks with a bartender who has opened his doors to gain business from this "social"

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(27) See Franklin Court, "A Vigilante's Fantasy" in A Study Guide to 'The Long Valley,' ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), p. 53-56.



event.

For Mike, the world of violence has become real, and consequently his own normal world is now perceived as dead and asleep. His depraved nature has been called into activity as he brags about his participation and his intimate involvement when he is questioned about the lynching. Discovering another side to his personality that he had not known existed, it is as though a new vista has opened for him, blocking out his normal world and suggesting that it, rather than the participation in the lynching, is the ultimate fantasy or untruth. He then repeats the specific details, dwelling on the fact the street lights were shot out and the final assaults were accomplished in darkness. This recurring emphasis of light/darkness imagery signals yet another Steinbeck story concerned with the fine line between good and evil.

In Mike's mind, his essential unity of manhood with the black man is never fully realized. The Negro, rather than the vigilantes, is described as a fiend. Yet the story's presentation indicates the essential evil of the vigilantes as well, and Steinbeck's interest in moral ambiguity resurfaces once more. For example, Mike is upset that the Negro might have been dead before he was hanged. It isn't the same if the thing wasn't done right (The Long Valley, p.138). The fact that Mike has kept a souvenir of the hanging, a piece of the dead man's pants, offers further evidence of the degradation

of his character as he participated with the vigilantes. His willingness to sell it for two dollars also emphasizes the depravity of the act. His normal life of ordered gardens, stasis and immobility, is superceded by the "alive" world of murder.

However, after the bar is shut up, and the two men are walking home, there is no indication of a moral revulsion at the lynching. It is as though nothing bad has happened. Although a man's life had been taken by a group of solid upstanding citizens, the act itself is acceptable. These citizens, moved by fiendish stereotyping, have condemned a man without knowing "what kind of a fella he really was" (The Long Valley, p.140). He is merely a sacrificial victim like Root in "The Raid" and Jim in "In Dubious Battle," who both find their only defense is the stunned silence of a Billy Budd. The innocent individual cannot change the warped views of the more powerful group. As Court notes, "Mike, however, has no such luck. Hence, the futility of his life becomes paramount...He too looks into the darkness, but he does not feel foolish."(28)

When again outside, Mike is trapped by the loneliness and the nothingness of the dark. Perhaps all is "nada" as is suggested in Hemingway's A Clean Well Lighted Place. It is

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(28)Court, p.55.

safer in the dark where the street lights are fewer and where people do not confront morality but are content to exist in an essentially amoral world. Mike's return home helps him analyze the feeling he has experienced at the hanging. It is similar to the heightened sensuality of a sexual release. It is life and death paradoxically combined. Unfortunately, Mike's insight allows him no more than identification of his feelings. He does not probe or examine them as he stares into the mirror. He has seen himself, but the knowledge does not possess redemptive qualities. He is, as Court calls him, a "victim of society diseased by too much order, by too many neatly cut lawns...victim of a hopeless confusion of fact and fancy."(29)

The bleak viewpoint of the earlier works in the Steinbeck canon is again obvious. Men attempt to see or break through but are frustrated by the blinders of absolutes and stereotypes. The neat and orderly world of morality is rejected for the disordered and chaotic environs of nightmare. Man's duality is evident and inevitably he chooses to ignore his potential for good or allow his dark side to dominate. However, The Long Valley at least presents some hope of change, of introspection that may lead to insight and self-discovery.

"Johnny Bear," the ninth story in the collection, has

often been compared to Of Mice and Men and to the Tularecito episode in The Pastures of Heaven, due to its inclusion of a sub-human mentally deficient character. But while the other two stories center on this pathetic creature, the character Johnny Bear is more tangential in this narrative with more emphasis being placed on the narrator, a casual observer who works for a company trying to reclaim the area from swamp.

Even this physical setting sets up the conflict between the mores of primitive man vs. those of a more civilized society. The story, unlike others in the collection, is told surprisingly in first person and follows the narrator's observations of the citizens of the town of Loma, especially a mentally retarded man who is cruelly nicknamed Johnny Bear. Steinbeck suggests early the moral preoccupation of his story when he describes the location of the Methodist church. It has the highest place on the hill and its spire is visible for miles. No doubt it is a prime motivator for the people of Loma, yet the narrator stresses that the duality of their nature also led them to another public place, the saloon. Steinbeck often juxtaposed these two opposites and claimed that somehow their influence on mankind was similar. Similarly, Steinbeck associates the church and the whorehouse as paradoxically equal influences in East of Eden, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday. The bartender at the saloon, Fat Carl, also has ambiguous characteristics associated with man's dual nature. He is sour and downright unfriendly, but at the

same time he makes his customers feel gratified and warm. This same ambiguity pervades his place of business which is described as terrible and at the same time nice (The Long Valley, p.147).

While frequenting the bar to escape the sounds of the dredging company and his own dismal room, the narrator is introduced to Johnny Bear, who is described as a kind of throwback to the animal kingdom, an evolving yet non-human beast. Johnny Bear's arrival at the bar always motivates the customers to buy him a drink if only to see his latest performance, for despite his idiotic appearance, Johnny Bear is a master of acting. He reproduces sounds and all the exact conversations that he overhears in the town, exposing even the narrator to ridicule and raucous laughter. At the same time, his performances also produce an accurate mirror image of each man's true self, undistorted by self-pride or self-pity.

The perfection of Johnny's performance is so accurate that it astounds the narrator, and he questions his friend about Johnny Bear's motivation. He discovers that his acts are not malicious but only a way to get the men in the saloon to buy him whiskey. He is merely an animal who rotely memorizes and reproduces words and voices but possesses no understanding. He repeats scandal or evil with only a "good" purpose in mind, getting his whiskey. In fact, his dual nature is even mirrored in the narrator's physical description of him. "There was a paradox about his movement. He looked

twisted and shapeless, and yet he moved with complete lack of effort" (The Long Valley, p.152).

Attempting to get more whiskey, Johnny proceeds to reveal another scandal within the town of Loma. This story too is enveloped in moral ambiguity. He reveals the double nature of Amy Hawkins and her sister, Emalin, who are aristocratic, maiden ladies, and who serve as symbols of kind and "good" people to the residents of the village. As Johnny mimics and faithfully reproduces their conversation, he shows the evil side of their nature. Emalin is revealed as the stolid immovable sister, never tempted by evil, while Amy describes herself as a monster who can't help herself (The Long Valley, p.153). However, as the story unfolds, Emalin's depraved and cruel nature is also revealed.

The rigid Emalin decries her sister's weakness and upbraids her indulgence in evil. In fact, Emalin's rigid Puritanical beliefs are instrumental in warping her sister's perception of her own moral ambiguity. Instead she demands an end to Amy's expression of guilt through crying and whining. The revelation of the Hawkins' duality shocks the patrons at the bar, but despite their horrified reaction, Fat Carl, the bartender, provides Johnny with a drink on the house. This drink, however, is not a reward for entertainment, but a plea to stop, to refrain from destroying the town's fantasies about the Hawkins. Yet Johnny Bear reads the free whiskey as encouragement and, according to the narrator's friend, Alex,

will probably continue to haunt the Hawkins' place for new information that will bring more liquor and the "good" feelings that accompany being drunk.

The narrator's assessment of what he has heard provides Steinbeck's focus for the rest of the story. He is chilled by the event and pictures the misery-broken face of Amy as she is confronted by the unyielding Puritanism of Emalin. Here Steinbeck again focuses on light and dark imagery as the narrator tries to block out the perceived despair of the younger sister. In order to accomplish this, the narrator leaves on the light and shuts out the sound of the dredging, which symbolizes the evil dug up by Johnny Bear.

The next day, Sunday, Alex drives the narrator past the Hawkins' house which he describes as barricaded by a thick and strong hedge that obscures it from the view of others. Symbolically, the hedge is the outward appearance of the "good" sisters which blocks any real insight into their private affairs and blocks personal introspection as well.

As the two men observe the sisters, Steinbeck again uses physical characteristics to reveal how the rigid moral standards have shaped the two. Emalin is described with "clear straight eyes, the sharp sure chin, the mouth cut with the precision of a diamond, the stiff, curveless figure," while Amy's edges are softer, her eyes warm, her mouth full. "But whereas Emalin's mouth was straight by nature, Amy held her mouth straight" (The Long Valley, p.157). Like Peter

Randall, the younger sister holds in and restrains her sinful nature artificially, while the older sister seems to possess the traits of upright living instinctively. Yet her structured and rigid morality also deprive her of gentle humanity and caring. As the narrator states, the community needs those women. It makes the town feel safe from its constant fog and the great swamp which surrounds Loma like a hideous sin (The Long Valley, p.158).

Yet Johnny Bear does not sense this need for the town to balance its evil with a sense of good. As the narrator notes, all the patrons of the Buffalo Bar will be back that evening, drawn by a paradoxical desire to destroy and yet preserve the spinsters' reputations. The Bar is a newspaper, a theater, and a club, and even the narrator and his friend, Alex, will gravitate there eventually, despite its bad whiskey.

Steinbeck prefigures impending disaster for Amy Hawkins when the narrator and Alex meet the doctor on his way in to town. Later in the bar, Johnny Bear relates the doctor's conversation at the house, and the entire room is made aware of Amy's attempted suicide. The narrator, who in moral ambiguity, has paid for Johnny's drink and encouraged his encore performance, is appalled at his own actions. He turns apologetically to his friend and asks forgiveness for his "sin." He has been mystically drawn to do what he is repelled by. The sense of evil is further symbolized by rags of fog creeping and climbing like slow snakes to the top of the town;



in short, Steinbeck paints a setting which struggles to overcome any sense of good the narrator might possess.

Consequently, the narrator quickly leaves the bar in hopes of escaping his mistake. But he finds that life in his isolated construction camp is just as dreary and unpredictable as the life inside the town. Here, too, evil maliciously intertwines itself with his everyday life. Symbolically, the narrator once again finds parallels in the revelation of evil by Johnny Bear to his job as a dredger in the construction business. In his career, he realizes digging in the mud and filth often has horrendous consequences, such as severed limbs and blood poisoning. Similarly, Johnny Bear's eavesdropping into the dark side of the Hawkins sisters' personalities will also cause problems. The foreshadowing is ominous.

When the narrator returns to Loma, he recognizes the continuing misery of the Hawkins' sisters. As Alex says, "There's something hanging over those people." The narrator notes with surprise Alex's personal interest and points out that it is almost as if he were related to the women. This, of course, is an accurate observation because due to the inherent duality of all men, Alex and the narrator are both relatives of the unfortunate women. Alex says, "They can't do anything bad. It wouldn't be good for any of us if the Hawkins sisters weren't the Hawkins sisters" (The Long Valley, p.163). They are the conscience of the community.

The safe thing. The place where a kid can get

gingerbread. The place where a girl can get reassurance. They're proud, but they believe in things we hope are true. And they live as though--well, as though honesty really is the best policy and charity really is its own reward. We need them" (The Long Valley, p.163).

Alex senses, however, that the sisters are fighting something terrible, and he blames it on Johnny Bear rather than on man's dual nature where the blame rightfully lies. The narrator reminds Alex that killing Johnny Bear won't help. "'It's not his fault,' [he] argued. 'He's just a kind of recording and reproducing device, only you use a glass of whiskey instead of a nickel'" (The Long Valley, p.164). As the narrator returns home, he notices the fog has symbolically enveloped the Hawkins' home and that no lights are evident.

Two days later, the narrator returns to the Buffalo Bar amid rumors of Miss Amy's suicide. When Johnny Bear arrives, the whole group of patrons is motivated by their evil desire to know the details of the younger sister's death, facts they are sure Johnny Bear possesses. "They were ashamed of wanting to know, but their whole mental system required the knowledge" (The Long Valley, p.165). Since the drink is on the house, Johnny Bear willingly relates Miss Amy's hanging and the unthinkable detail that she was also pregnant. The repeated conversation also indicates that perhaps Emalin cooperated in her death by not trying to find her and prevent the act as she had the first time.

Again, Steinbeck portrays the animal nature of Johnny Bear. He is like a badger, digging up dirt to auction off,

but ironically the animalism of the so-called "good" patrons of the bar is just as horrific. The difference is that Johnny Bear does not understand what he repeats, but the men consciously seek out the evil which mars the Hawkins name.

Alex, the narrator's friend, is most sensitive to the destruction of the Hawkins' reputation because he recognizes his kinship in darkness. Therefore, he is quick to stop Johnny Bear's mouth from revealing a further defamation of the Hawkins name by stating that Amy's pregnancy was the result of a liason with a Chinese. However, Alex hopes that at least some part of the illusion of good can be preserved. Therefore, he resorts to a violent punch to end the revelation and bring about what he considers good. Once again a paradox is present, as a negative is used to bring about a positive.

Both the narrator and Alex have observed their own dark sides in Johnny Bear's innocent ramblings. They have sensed man's ambiguous revelry in and his simultaneous revulsion to evil. Yet they cling to the barest fragment of moral rectitude and uprightness in hopes that the darkness will not envelop them completely. They struggle to maintain the possibility of "good," despite the mounting evidence that evil will dominate and control.

"The Murder" depicts yet another Steinbeck valley of the title. Despite the original impression of the story, that only a dominated woman and a dominant man will be happy together, the introductory paragraph indicates that

Steinbeck's primary interest is in man's progress in morality and ethics. As he describes the Canon del Castillo, Steinbeck points out that among the rock formation there is a strange castle which reminds him of the time of the Crusades. It is in contrast to an old ranch house, now deserted, which is weathered and mossy. I believe the castle stands for this stern, harsh approach to moral absolutes of the past and is contrasted with the less rigid permissive stance of the present. The latter site also provides the motivation for the narrator to relate the story of Jim Moore and to offer to the reader another moral lesson.

Although some critics have seen this story as prejudicial toward an ethnic group and condemned it for its racism, Steinbeck's presentation of Jelka Sepic, a Jugo-Slav girl who marries Jim Moore, is not intended to merely cut down foreigners. Critics who point out Steinbeck's xenophobia by discussing his treatment of the "yellow peril" or noting his portrayal of ignorant immigrants and foreigners miss the point entirely. Instead stories like "The Murder" present the problem of how man should deal with his dubious stances toward good and evil.

Jelka, described as beautiful, quiet and gentle, has a contrasting nature that will need subduing, as her father warns Jim. "'Don't be big fool, now,' he says. 'Jelka is Slav girl. He's not like American girl. If he is bad, beat him. If he's good too long, beat him too'" (The Long Valley,

p.173). The extremes of behavior are not to be trusted, and the only way to root out Jelka's evil tendencies is to resort to harsh physical punishment.

Jelka, as Katherine and Robert Mossberger have noted, is portrayed throughout the story with animal characteristics.(30) She is docile, learns by instinct, and seems to worship Jim as an animal would worship its master. As Steinbeck says, "She was so much like an animal that sometimes Jim patted her head and neck under the same impulse that made him stroke a horse" (The Long Valley, p.173). She also obeys with disinterest as an animal would. Physically, she is also a contradiction. Described with straight black hair and unbelievably smooth golden shoulders, the only time she indicates her unique individuality is during sex. "Only in the climax of his embrace did she seem to have a life apart, fierce and passionate. And then immediately she lapsed into the alert and painfully dutiful wife" (The Long Valley, p.174).

Jim's dissatisfaction with the marriage is indicated by his restlessness. His dual nature cannot cope with Jelka's submissiveness and her lack of interest in conversation. He is forced to fulfill this need for human interaction outside of his marriage. "When a year had passed, Jim began to crave

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(30)See Katherine M. and Robert E. Morsberger, "'The Murder' - Realism or Ritual?", in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's 'The Long Valley', ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), pp.65-71.

the company of women, the chattering exchange of small talk, the shrill pleasant insults, the shame-sharpened vulgarity" (The Long Valley, p.174). His frustration with Jelka grows since he finds himself unable to plumb her mind and discover what she is thinking. In fact, her answer to his query about her thoughts echoes Steinbeck's Pilon in Tortilla Flat and reiterates Steinbeck's symbolic use of white and black. Jelka replies she is "thinking of the eggs (white) under the black hen" (The Long Valley, p.177). I believe her answer indicates that she also is contemplating her paradoxical need to indulge in evil despite its possible consequences. Just as Pilon speaks of the belly of every black thing as being as white as snow, so Jelka combines a belief in Christ and God with her own animal nature.(31)

Jim's preparation to leave again confirms Jelka's animal nature. If there are social and moral laws established by men, she is unaware of them, reacting almost totally by instinct. She is unlike the blond Mae at the whorehouse in Monterey whom Jim has resorted to seeing to fulfill his needs. But before he can go to town, he is informed by his neighbor that a rustler is stealing his calves. This is a foreshadowing that Jelka, a symbolic calf, has also been stolen from under Jim's watchful eye. In his stalking of the rustlers, Jim returns to a primitive moral code: an eye for an

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(31)See John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, p.175 and John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, p.45.

eye. He does not acknowledge the possibility of moral ambiguity in the actions of the rustlers, that their motives for stealing may indeed be "good". Moreover, he also fails to accept the fact that like Jelka they may be totally unaware of social or moral laws. This denial of the duality of others ironically promotes his own duality as he follows the letter of the law rather than its spirit. Like primitive man in the Middle Ages, Steinbeck portrays him as drawing his gun from his holster and making chase. As he returns in the dark, he discovers another betrayal, his wife's infidelity. His first reaction is grief, but soon he hardens and in guilt blames himself for not taking her father's advice about strict punishment. Here Steinbeck seems to suggest that without rigid regulation, man's depraved nature will conquer his tendency toward good. Thus, Jim's anger causes an unexpected act. As he symbolically destroys the moon's reflecting ray in the water trough, Jim dispels the demands of light and good on him, and recognizes that man's dark side indeed is dominant. In fact, the light/dark imagery pervades this section of the story as Jim moves back and forth from darkness (blackness, evil) to light (good). Later, he mercilessly kills the intruder and leaves Jelka whimpering and whining like a cold puppy.

But Jim has changed; he has committed a murder. He is simultaneously revolted by it and yet determined that it is the correct thing to do. Surprisingly, when learning of the

crime, civilized society also agrees to look the other way, to see a "good" in the "evil." According to society, there is a proper motivation in this murder. Therefore, the sheriff says, "Of course there's a technical charge of murder against you, but it'll be dismissed. Always is in this part of the country. Go kind of light on your wife, Mr. Moore" (The Long Valley, p.185). Although at the time Jim feels appalled by his crime, he comes to recognize that the advice of his father-in-law was accurate: violence is often necessary to affect good. Despite the fact that he promises the sheriff not to hurt his wife, he does take her to the barn and whip her after the lawman leaves. Ironically, the result of his physical punishment is submission rather than rebellion. Evil again brings about good. Jelka the animal has been civilized and trained only by the threat of violent punishment. Steinbeck here symbolically stresses that for man's evil animal side to be tamed, there must be dire consequences and punishment. Without them evil will rage as surely as it did during medieval times when random killing was expected of the questor/knight. Jim, as a modern knight, recognizes that man's duplicitous nature can only be dealt with by the paradox of meting out evil for evil. Strangely, good will result, and two wrongs ironically will make a right. Jelka, her mouth sore from the beating and symbolizing the horse/wife now trained to the bit, reacts positively to her punishment. She agrees to leave the old house, and she acknowledges the



goodness of Jim's decision. Although he vows not to whip her again for her actions, the implication is that more whippings will follow, motivated by still other sins. Submissiveness, thus, is shown to be subject to harsh punishment.

Most critics dismiss the next story, "Saint Katy the virgin," as an inappropriate inclusion in this collection. They argue that it does not fit because of its genre - moral fabliaux and its setting in the 1300's. However, given its relation to the theme of moral ambiguity, there is increasing proof that, despite its obvious differences, it does indeed have some telling similarities to the other short stories in this volume.

Appropriately, Katy is a "bad" pig, kept by a "bad" man named Roark. Yet the duality of Roark's character is also evident in Steinbeck's prose. Roark's dark tight face makes his laughter appear to be its opposite, sadness and fear. With tongue in cheek, Steinbeck facetiously suggests that since Roark has seen the bad things about the world, it was no wonder that his pig also turned bad. In fact, Steinbeck even contends that Katy's "bad" is not genetic. His facts indicate Katy's parents were good modest pigs and symbolically denies the concept of original sin being passed from one generation to the next. Yet Katy's evil develops despite this lack of genetic evil traits. Although she obviously represents humanity, from the beginning she seems inhuman, a monster like Steinbeck would later create in Cathy Ames of East of Eden.

Immediately after birth she attacks the rest of her siblings in the little pen and eats them. She also is said to have eaten the chickens and ducks that belonged to Roark and his neighbors.

Yet in spite of her evil nature, and in typical moral ambiguity, Roark grows fonder and fonder of Katy until she is bred and unabashedly eats all of her own litter. This act truly offends even the bad man "for as everyone knows, a sow that will eat her own young is depraved beyond human ability to conceive wickedness" (The Long Valley, p.191). As Roark is about to kill Katy, he is confronted by two priests of the church. Vividly described as complete opposites, the priests, Colin and Paul, are nonetheless similarly labeled as "fine and good" men. As a joke, Roark decides to give the evil pig to the good men. But even before the priests are able to get her out of the gate, Katy attacks them and forces them up a thorn tree. Obviously Brother Paul's effort of attacking evil by kicking the end of Katy's snout does not work, and Katy persists in attacking the brothers even when they attempt to exorcise the demons who they feel are controlling her.

The exorcism, of course, is not successful, and it demonstrates that the pigheaded Katy does not react either to punishment or to a spiritual denunciation. Obviously, Steinbeck is here acknowledging that what worked for Jelka in "The Murder" is not an absolute or a keystone to solving every moral dilemma. However, when Brother Paul dangles the

crucifix in front of her, "The air, the tree, the earth shuddered in an expectant silence, while goodness fought with sin" (The Long Valley, p.196). Katy's conversion from evil to good is imminent as she "stretches prostrate on the ground, making the sign of the cross with her right hoof and mooring softly in anguish at the realization of her crimes" (The Long Valley, p.196). Here Steinbeck seems to be mocking the miraculous powers of religion to affect change in pigs or men. Though outwardly professing good, Katy still retains her human/animal nature and the details of her evilness remain vivid in the reader's mind. However, her transformation even affects Roark. Watching all this, he too has his whole life changed in a moment.

When Paul and Colin return with the converted pig, however, there is no rejoicing. As Father Benedict notes, "'You are a fool...We can't slaughter this pig. This pig is a Christian'...'Hush!' said the Abbot. 'There are plenty of Christians. This year there's a great shortage of pigs'" (The Long Valley, p.198). p.198). The church people seem unimpressed with the conversion and instead think only of their own stomachs and how good Katy would taste if she could be slaughtered and roasted. Thus, in typical moral ambiguity, the conversion is bad, since it destroys a good meal.

The story proceeds to relate Katy's good deeds as a converted porker. In fact, she becomes so devoted that she is considered saintly after she spins on the tip of her tail for

almost two hours. Even though she has been a stubborn pig and has destroyed many lives, it is thought by many that her converted life makes her worthy for election to sainthood. Even her bearing of the litter and later eating her own offspring is disregarded, and she is called Saint Katy the virgin. The proponents of her virginity argued:

"...there are two kinds of virginity. Some hold that virginity consists in a little bit of tissue. If you have it, you are; if you haven't, you aren't. This definition is a grave danger to the basis of our religion since there is nothing to differentiate between the Grace of God knocking it out from the inside or the wickedness of man from the outside. On the other," he continued, "there is virginity by intent, and this definition admits the existence of a great many more virgins than the first does" (The Long Valley, p.199).

Thus Steinbeck's fabliaux illustrates how even black can be rationalized into white, evil into good and how Saint Katy the Virgin, who was in reality a sad mixture of the two tendencies of pigs (and man) was relegated by society to the extremes of actions. She either had to be all good or all bad, and it was purely public opinion that made her so. Here I believe Steinbeck again asserts that society is unwilling to acknowledge that good can spring out of evil and that great miracles can be brought about by the very evil that would seem to oppose them. Instead, society imposes its own labels for whatever is convenient at the time. Thus "good" and "evil" fluctuate wildly as the opinion of society shifts. If moral absolutes did indeed exist, this would not happen. However, once again, the problem is moral ambiguity.

The tongue-in-cheek joking attitude revealed in "Saint Katy" prefigures Steinbeck's rare sense of humor in Cannery Row, The Grapes of Wrath, Sweet Thursday, and The Winter of Our Discontent. Yet, this subtle humor is so layered in seriousness that as the reader chuckles, tears come to his eyes as well.

Ironically, Roark is labeled evil for minor offenses, (laughing too much at the wrong times at the wrong people), while Katy, truly evil by nature, is converted and awarded sainthood. Another irony in the story is the fact that Roark plans the gift of Katy as an evil joke, and it turns out to be a positive experience. This positive is later reversed again when the priests find the conversion bad because they cannot eat the pig, since it is now a Christian and saintly.

Katy no doubt is Steinbeck's symbol for man, "headstrong and heretic of beasts," who by nature is destructive and evil. Essentially self-destructive and hurtful to his own kind and others, man cannot be changed by opposing power or violence but may, given a moral identity, be transformed and attain a questionable sainthood. This goodness is elevated by others till the past evil acts of such individuals are forgotten and instead of mankind being seen as inherently depraved, he is rather portrayed as miraculously good! In a similar manner to the previous stories in the collection, Katy also portrays the dilemma of the long valley - of life where fallen man attempts to again reach perfection or to mask his sin with social

acceptance as a type of good.

The Long Valley concludes with the four sections of Steinbeck's novella, "The Red Pony." As Steinbeck explores the maturation process of young Jody Tiflin, I believe that he again examines the confusion that is faced when a youth discovers that the world is not simplistically classified and that more grey areas exist in life than black and white.

In the first episode, "The Gift," the reader is introduced to two major influences on Jody's life - his father, Carl, and the ranch foreman, Billy Buck. At age ten, Jody is still ruled by absolutes. As Steinbeck says, "The triangle picked him up out of sleep. It didn't occur to him to disobey the harsh note. He never had: no one he knew ever had" (The Long Valley, p.204). But in his growing to adulthood, Jody begins to examine his own values and to question those of his role models as well. In each of the episodes, it is death which confronts Jody, which demands of him, as it did of Pepe' in "Flight," a confrontation with what he really is and an acknowledgment of his true inner nature. By observing the natural world, Jody sees the images of life and death, good and evil, all around him even though his naivete at times prohibits a valid interpretation of these images. Although these symbols are veiled, Jody senses some communication in them. For example, life is represented by the spot of blood on the egg yolk and by the cold spring water, while death is shown in Doubletree Mutt's showdown with

the coyote, by the scalding of the pig and by the two buzzards which hover over the farm. (The Long Valley, p.206)

This is the odd mixture of symbols which Jody only partially understands. However, these symbols provide, as Steinbeck describes it, "an uncertainty in the air, a feeling of change and of loss and of the gain of the new and unfamiliar things" (The Long Valley, p.206). In fact, as he begins his rite of passage into adolescence, Jody is experimenting with the adult world of experience. Unlike his previous child-like state, he is drawn to bad as he smashes the green muskmelon with his heel. His reaction shows his confusion. "...but he was not happy about it. It was a bad thing to do, he knew perfectly well. He kicked the dirt over the ruined melon to conceal it" (The Long Valley, p.207).

This confusion continues with his attempt to hit a bird or a rabbit with little pieces of white quartz that lay in the road. A sense of rebellion against rules, laws and responsibility dominates him as he finds his parents increasingly critical of his lack of maturity. In typical ambiguity, Jody values his childhood but also yearns for adulthood. He rejects the restrictions/laws placed on youth and desires the freedom/promiscuity of a grown-up. He is especially fascinated by the gun he owns, and, although he does not possess cartridges, he is impressed by the power it symbolizes. Yet his actions with the gun indicate his personality is still childish and caught in the dilemma of

adolescence, desiring innocence and naivete, but at the same time recognizing the values of experience and initiation into evil. To be trapped between the two extremes is frustrating, much as the images of life and death in nature which Jody only partially understands. He senses the paradoxical fact that something has to die so that new life can spring up.

Carl Tiflin, Jody's father, is not sure of how to deal with his son's increasing maturity. His approach is stern, cross and disciplinary, which reveals his one-sided attitude about life. With his maturity, Carl has recognized the real world and has discovered that it is not tinged with any brightness or happiness. Even in his gift of the red pony to his son, Carl displays his rigid lack of feeling. It seems to me that he gives orders bluntly rather than being a considerate and caring parent; consequently, his version of the adult world does not appeal to his son. Such a negative and pessimistic view of life and living is not what Jody is searching for.

On the other hand, Jody's other role model, Billy Buck, is presented as amiable and more reasonable about the adult life. He becomes the image of adulthood which combines the best of both worlds. He is idolized, and seen as the adult with a positive stance - an opposite of Jody's father. In fact, his name even brings to mind Herman Melville's classic hero, the perfect seaman, Billy Budd. The gift of the pony, Gabilan, which provides the title of the story, involves both



men and serves as a rite of passage, an indicator of Jody's new-found role, his maturation as an adult. Yet it is also an ironic foreshadowing since the pony's name is only a letter away from the spelling of its eventual destroyer (Spanish "gavilan" = vulture). However, despite this irony, even the peers whom Jody brings to look at Gabilan sense the difference in their friend after the gift.

They knew instinctively that a man on a horse is spiritually as well as physically bigger than a man on foot. They knew that Jody had been miraculously lifted out of equality with them, and had been placed over them (The Long Valley, p.213).

Yet despite the sense of pride and responsibility Gabilan arouses in Jody, his immaturity is still shown by his inability to remember and take care of other chores. He has the outer trappings of adulthood, but not its true maturity. He is still learning, and basically Billy Buck and Gabilan are his teachers. Significantly, Gabilan's own evil/good tendencies mirror the human world. Although he is trained easily and responds to the restraints put upon him by the bridle and halter, his instincts are toward more negative things. Steinbeck states,

He bit Jody in the pants and stomped on Jody's feet. Now and then his ears went back and he aimed a tremendous kick at the boy. Every time he did one of these bad things, Gabilan settled back and seemed to laugh at himself (The Long Valley, p.218).

Jody, of course tries to regulate this behavior by negative reinforcement or punishment. In a similar manner, Jody's bad traits are also regulated or bridled by the rigid

rules of his father. For example, his father's displeasure at the trick pony and his edict that there will be no riding till Thanksgiving indicate his unwillingness to acknowledge Jody's approaching passage into manhood. Consequently, Jody turns to Billy Buck for consolation. Even as his father represents the negative side of adult life, Billy comes to represent perfection of mankind and acceptance of Jody's new-found life and escape from childhood. As the first section of the novella continues, Jody finally realizes that neither extreme, his father or Billy, is without flaw.

His first indication that Billy is less than perfect is his mistaken prediction about the rain. As a result, Jody leaves Gabilan in the corral, and the horse becomes seriously sick from staying out in the raw weather. Billy recognizes that, in Jody's eyes, he has no right to be fallible (The Long Valley, p.224), but despite his best intentions, his flawed nature at times dominates. Like Carl, who hates weakness, sickness, and helplessness, Billy also strives for absolutes, but unlike Carl, when it comes to actually producing, Billy partially recognizes his inability to maintain the extreme. Yet to maintain his stature in Jody's eyes, he creates an illusion that all is well with Gabilan. He says, "...he'll be all right in the morning... He just took a little cold...We'll have him out of it in a couple of days" (The Long Valley, pp.226-227). He assures Jody he will pull Gabilan out of his illness even though Jody senses the seriousness of his

sickness. Symbolically, Steinbeck foreshadows Billy's failure and Gabilan's impending death by having Jody observe a hawk being driven from the sky by two blackbirds.

At first everyone in the family seems unwilling to face reality, preferring the illusion of stories to dispel that awful fact that Gabilan will not recover. However, eventually Billy Buck does admit the seriousness of the infection. Yet hope remains for the horse's survival. Like humankind, although Gabilan is infected with evil, there is still a chance that he will overcome it with the proper treatment. Again Jody is confronted with moral ambiguity; suffering and pain are required in order to cure disease. Gabilan's windpipe must be opened, and he must be tended constantly.

Jody's father obviously feels that his son should not be exposed to such a demanding reality. Instead, he feels it is better to escape self-recognition, to shut out the harsh reality of impending death. "'Hadn't you better come with me? I'm going to drive over the hill.' Jody shook his head. 'You better come on, out of this,' his father insisted" (The Long Valley, pp.234-235). However, Billy Buck recognizes the importance of this experience and reprimands Carl by saying, "Let him alone. It's his pony, isn't it" (The Long Valley, p.235)? Here Billy realizes that part of growing up is recognizing the incongruities of life and that nature's lessons, especially with Gabilan, are helping Jody do exactly that. The farm becomes a backdrop for the lessons of life as

Jody recognizes that evil and good are coexistent in the world, in Gabilan and in himself. The swollen tick of evil may be crushed, the yellow poison temporarily removed, but all the cold spring water in the world will not erase the blot of man's fall and his sinful nature. (The Long Valley, p.235.)

Yet even after Gabilan's death, Jody strikes out at the buzzards in a futile attempt to ward off the symbols of evil in the world. In frustration he strangles the bird and pounds its head with a stone. Yet the hard facts still confront him. The black brotherhood of vultures remains, and Gabilan is dead. Evil, as the buzzard, still has "red fearless eyes" and is "impersonal and unafraid and detached" (The Long Valley, p.238). Yet Jody's father misunderstands his act of protest and again refuses to recognize the difference between feelings and knowledge. As Robert Benson notes:

Carl is blind; he hates weakness in others but cannot see himself. Jody has grown and accepts his responsibility for the pony's death. But Carl does not understand this. Billy is the natural man who can sense the magnitude of Jody's grief and who alone is capable of the appropriate response.(32)

He sees only the outward happening, rather than the inner meaning of Gabilan's death. The Gift has enabled Jody, in a way unanticipated by his father, to confront life head on: a life that is good despite the constant threat of impending death, a life that provides hope in despair, a life that

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(32)Robert M. Benton, "Realism, Growth, and Contrast in 'The Gift'", in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's 'The Long Valley', ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976),p.87.

declares paradoxes and still can be accepted.

Jody's maturation process has begun in earnest. The rite of passage, however, is not so easily attained. In order to further emphasize the necessary length of time required for its full realization, Steinbeck continues Jody's story with the counterpoint tale of "The Great Mountain."

Jody here is still an awkward adolescent, bored with the simplistic life of the child and anticipating the more active and vital life of the adult. Instinctively, rather than deliberately, he chooses to pass the time with evil; he breaks swallows' nests and sets an intentional rat trap for Doubletree Mutt. But all of this occurs without malice; it is merely a way of relieving his boredom. When his unintentional slingshot throw actually does kill a bird, he is surprisingly unaffected. The self-realization found in episode one is not yet permanent.

Instead, instinct motivates his action as he feels the mean pain in his stomach. His heartless action of dismembering the bird and tossing it into the brush reveals his darker side. As Steinbeck says,

He didn't care about the bird, or its life, but he knew what older people would say if they had seen him kill it; he was ashamed because of their potential opinion. He decided to forget the whole thing as quickly as he could, and never to mention it (The Long Valley, p.240).

In this passage, Steinbeck once again portrays the strength of society (the group) in determining good and bad, and the pressure which is placed on individuals to conform to its

rules. However, Jody's personality has another milder side also revealed in nature by the spring pipe and the summer clouds. In addition, his duality is reflected in the two ranges of mountains, the Gabilans and the Great Ones. The former is depicted as jolly and gay while the latter are curious, secret and mysterious.

Drawn by their contrast, Jody is fascinated by what may be between in the vast unexplored area. Although he is told there is nothing but cliffs, brush, rocks and dryness, he is convinced that there is potential there and that it is something wonderful (The Long Valley, p.241). Symbolically, I believe Steinbeck is suggesting that there is more to the valley of life and death than aridity, and, that if man strives and works at it, he can attain self-knowledge which will be an enabling factor him during his life's journey. The desolation and loneliness of the mountains makes them paradoxically dear to Jody and at the same time terrible. Since their duality mirrors his own emotions, the boy finds them attractive and repelling at the same time.

When the peaks were pink in the morning they invited him among them; and when the sun had gone over the edge in the evening and the mountains were a purple-like despair, then Jody was afraid of them; then they were so impersonal and aloof that their very imperturbability was a threat (The Long Valley, p.242).

The visitor who suddenly appears at Jody's ranch reinforces Jody's mysterious perception of duality in nature and in himself. One critic even sees him as the Questor

knight and the Maimed King of Arthurian Grail legends.(33) Steinbeck's depiction of Gitano uses his typical black/white imagery to suggest the two sides of his character. Especially prominent is his dark skin as contrasted with his white moustache and hair. Gitano has returned to his home territory to die, and again Jody is confronted with an experience that will enlarge him and help him cope with adulthood. Somehow, Jody senses that Gitano's experience mirrors his own perceptions of the paradox of life and death, and Jody's increasing maturity is indicated by his ability to cope with the multiple paradoxes in life. Ironically however, Jody's father, though an adult in age, has not come to terms with life's paradox. Since he has not found the balance and does not recognize the dilemma of moral ambiguity, he reacts negatively to the stranger. Yet although Jody's father again shows his insensitivity to human emotions by summarily dismissing the ancient man, Gitano is persistent enough to convince Tiflin to let him spend at least one evening in the old bunkhouse.

As Jody shows him to this lodging, he questions Gitano about the ambiguity of the big mountains. Gitano has been there yet, like the narrator in "Breakfast", he finds it impossible to express what he has seen. However, he does not

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(33)Richard F. Peterson, "The Grail Legend and Steinbeck's 'The Great Mountains'", in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's "The Long Valley," ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976), pp.89-94.

confirm the rumor that it is a terrible and dry wasteland. Instead Gitano reflects that it was quiet and nice. Thus the valley of the shadow also has a paradoxical element of good and evil that Jody needs to understand as part of his adulthood.

Like Candy in Of Mice and Men, the worn-out Gitano associates himself with an animal, an old horse, which is symbolically named Easter. Like Gitano, Easter is crippled and in pain and considered worthless. Carl Tiflin speculates as does Slim about Candy's dog in Of Mice and Men, that euthanasia might be best for Easter. "One shot, a big noise, one big pain in the head maybe, and that's all. That's better than stiffness and sore teeth" (The Long Valley, p.249). Ironically, however, Carl simply turns Easter out to pasture and is more generous to his animal than to a fellow human being. The dark side of Carl's nature will not allow the positive side to surface. As Steinbeck says, "He hated his brutality toward old Gitano, and so he became brutal again" (The Long Valley, p.249). The bond between Gitano and Easter continues to develop during the day. Conversely, Carl Tiflin's anger and hatred grow. The old paisano is a threat, a symbol of all in life that he can not comprehend.

Gitano was mysterious like the mountains. There were ranges back as far as you could see, but behind the last range piled up against the sky there was a great unknown country. And Gitano was an old man, until you got to the dull dark eyes. And in behind them was some unknown thing. He didn't ever say enough to let you guess what was inside, under the eyes (The Long Valley, p.252).



Gitano stands for the mysterious life of the past that now has gone. Steinbeck will later parallel and contrast him in Jody's grandfather in the fourth section of "The Red Pony." However, Gitano's symbols of the past are dual. There is the adobe hut of the rancho which is now melted and dilapidated, destroyed and out-of-date. On the other hand, the more lasting symbol of the past is a rapier with a golden basket hilt. Gitano, like Don Quixote before him, is the knight/questor searching for dreams in life even though it is drawing to its close. Although the sword, a gift from Gitano's father, is beautiful, it has lost its practicality. Like Gitano, it represents a past age that was remarkable yet now has been discarded. This, too, is a duality that must be dealt with. The values and mores of a past age have been discarded even though they still possess tremendous appeal. When Jody sees the rapier by accident, he senses the importance of its dark light. Yet to reveal its existence would "destroy some fragile structure of truth. It was a truth that might be shattered by division" (The Long Valley, p.254).

The next morning both Gitano and Easter have left the farm, beginning a new quest. Jody understands that Gitano has gone to face his last challenge, the challenge of death. On the other hand, his father interprets the action as another in a series of thefts perpetrated by the old man. However, despite Carl's misinterpretation, Gitano's participation in

Jody's education has helped the boy to again see the duality of existence, to comprehend that the mystery of the Great Mountains is also the mystery of life and death. It is a paradox which still bothers the boy.

A longing caressed him, and it was so sharp that he wanted to cry to get it out of his breast. He lay down in the green grass near the round tub at the brush line. He covered his eyes with his crossed arms and lay there a long time, and he was full of a nameless sorrow (The Long Valley, p.256).

The next story in the novella, "The Promise," continues the seasonal sequence begun in "The Gift." The book itself covers a whole year as the story moves from Jody's fall from innocence in autumn, to his confrontation with Gitano and death in winter to the third section of spring and new life. In "The Promise," Jody once more has an experience with nature and animals. Although his gift, Gabilan, has been destroyed through his own carelessness and through his reliance on the perfection of Billy Buck, the spring brings him a new hope, a colt out of Nellie.

As the story begins, Steinbeck's use of paradoxical color opposites again indicates his interest in duality. The afternoon is green and gold with spring, and Jody and his imaginary army are depicted as grey and silent. As Jody marches home, his fantasy world includes even more grey items. Steinbeck describes a grey mist, a long grey rifle, an unexpected population of grey tigers and grey bears. In fact, Jody's imagination makes him an important adult hunter rather

than a boy on his way home from school. Sensing the fine line between illusion and reality, Jody again confronts his duplicity. His reactions toward nature are ambiguous, at times respectful and in awe, at other points careless and heartless in his unconcern.

The duality of his nature is also evident in the guilt Jody experiences when his mother announces that his father wants to see him. His mother greets his fearful question of "Is it something I did?" with a typical reply of "always a bad conscience" (The Long Valley, p.259). However, Steinbeck indicates that the reason for Jody's fear is the fine line which exists when drawing the boundaries between good and evil. As Jody notes, "...it was impossible to know what action might later be construed as a crime" (The Long Valley, p.259). Jody's reaction indicates that he does not view his father and his fluctuating moral standards sympathetically. Thus, although Carl has good intentions for Jody, his actions are often misinterpreted as uncaring and lacking in feeling. Similarly, his compliments are often mistaken for criticisms. As Carl discusses the Gabilan incident and the possibility of Jody raising a colt to replace his loss, Jody feels a strange sense of pride and embarrassment. Again adulthood is imminent, and Jody tries to curb his immature actions as he learns even more about life (The Long Valley, p.261).

The mating of Nellie and the stallion offers Jody a first-hand initiation into the creation of life and the sex

act. He sees that violence is strangely intermixed with birth, and the new life is sometimes purchased at a great price. Adults like Jess Taylor try to protect Jody's innocent and naive view of the world by suggesting that he avoid watching Sunday and Nellie mate, but Jody observes with interest the change in the mare as the stallion courts her aggressively.

The rest of the story follows Nellie's pregnancy closely. As the grain matures in summer, Nellie's colt grows. Jody wonders about what it will look like, and again Steinbeck mirrors the ambiguity of life in his use of color. As Billy Buck says, "Why, you can't ever tell. The stud is black and the dam is bay. Colt might be black or bay or gray or dappled. You can't tell. Sometimes a black dam might have a white colt" (The Long Valley, p.266). Symbolically, he is suggesting the moral standing of an offspring is not predetermined by its parents. Thus, Jody need not be like Carl anymore than Adam would need to be like Charles or Cal like Aron in Steinbeck's later novel, East of Eden. In addition, Steinbeck also uses color imagery in this section to prefigure the life and death struggle that birth may be.

"...And sometimes if it's wrong, you have to--" he paused.

"Have to what, Billy?"

"Have to tear the colt to pieces to get it out, or the mare'll die" (The Long Valley, p.267).

As he foreshadowed Gabilan's death from strangles, Steinbeck

also suggests the possible demise of Nellie and the colt in advance. Billy Buck's role, of course, is central to the episode. He has a chance to redeem himself from his previous "mistake" by delivering Nellie's colt. Although he has been fallible in the first episode of the novella, he may be able to restore his reputation. At the same time, he also recognizes the ambiguity of his situation. "All sorts of things might happen, and they wouldn't be my fault. I can't do everything" (The Long Valley, p.268).

Like many Steinbeck characters, Jody's personal relationship with forms of nature also helps to shape his personality and enable him to understand himself. The spring and the old green tub have become symbols of the expectant new life in the midst of desolation and brown baked hills of summer. Like the caves and secluded spots of The Grapes of Wrath and To A God Unknown, these secret places are rejuvenating. Here Jody suppresses his meanness and strives to find renewal, a rebirth of his caring, positive, "good" self. Yet for every positive, Jody finds a negative. In this case, it is the black cypress tree near the bunkhouse where the pigs are slaughtered. It symbolizes death while the tub and the spring symbolize life. Somehow the long awaited colt becomes a mysterious combination of the two. He is thought of as Jody passes the black cypress and is prematurely named Black Demon. Yet, although he is terrible to everyone save Jody, the colt is also associated with trilling water, green

grass and sunshine, all life symbols. (The Long Valley, p.269.)

Like Billy Buck, Jody begins to feel that he and his horse are one. "The two together were one glorious individual," just as Billy was half horse and half human (The Long Valley, pp.272-273). Yet the end of Nellie's pregnancy is fearful to Jody. It is associated with thick black night and with the evil black cypress tree. In terror Jody reverts to his idol, Billy Buck, to maintain the power of good, to assert the belief that it can triumph over evil. "You won't let anything happen, Billy, you're sure you won't" (The Long Valley, p.275)? However, at the same time he recognizes that things are not the same.

The blackness of the night, and the chilled mist struck him and enfolded him. He wished he believed everything Billy said as he had before the pony died. It was a moment before his eyes, blinded by the feeble lantern-flame, could make any form of the darkness (The Long Valley, p.276).

Billy, however, is determined to keep his promise to Jody despite the fact that he must sacrifice Nellie to do it. As he rips open the mother to save the colt, Billy goes against everything he has been taught as a horseman. As a role model, he makes the difficult and questionable ethical decision of life and death. The colors are again combined as Billy drags out "a big, white, dripping bundle. His teeth tore a hole in the covering. A little black head appeared through the tear, and little slick, wet ear" (The Long Valley, p. 279).

Thus death and life are strangely combined in the animal

world as they are in the human world. Jody recognizes this and though he has moved away from "the social or emotional innocence of the person who does not yet recognize himself as part of the human community,"(34) he "tried to be glad because of the colt, but the bloody face, and the haunted, tired eyes of Billy Buck hung in the air ahead of him. (The Long Valley, p.279.) Jody has seen the awful task of humanity is making choices and deciding between right and wrong in a world where even facts are vague and where decisions are often made with little hard evidence.

The fourth story, "The Leader of the People," was originally published as a single entity, but later it was Steinbeck's wish that it be considered the fourth part of this novella. With its inclusion, Steinbeck establishes a pair of comparison and contrasts. Sections One and Three deal with horses, nature, and the violence of life and death while Sections Two and Four deal with old men, dreamers, the past and symbolic death and resurrection. I believe all the episodes, when combined, emphasize and explain how the elements of experience define the rite of passage of a young boy and provide a positive bridge of understanding about the confusing realities of man and nature, both torn by the dilemma of moral ambiguity.

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(34)Robert H. Woodward, "The Promise of Steinbeck's 'The Promise', in A Study Guide to Steinbeck's "The Long Valley," ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1976),p.98.

Again Steinbeck begins with color imagery to suggest his theme. The black cypress tree which in the third section of the novella has been identified with evil and bad omens is now the home of a flock of white pigeons which are being stalked by a tortoise-shell cat. Jody's reaction to the scene is still doubtful and childish. Instead of perceiving the serious life/death struggle between opposites, he still sees it as another game to play; consequently, his involvement betrays his dual nature as he first thinks of scaring the cat away with a stone but ultimately whirls and scatters the pigeons. This destructive tendency is also shown in Jody's delight in finding mice under the haystack and in contemplating their deaths. However, his involvement and participation in destruction is limited. His father again is a setter of rules, a lawgiver whose expectations often exceed Jody's accomplishments. Jody is still experimenting with maturity and its boundaries, and the process is incomplete. The young boy still defines masculinity and maturity through outward appearances such as swearing. His arrogant and rebellious actions have earned him the title "Big Britches," an indication that he is too anxious to outgrow his childhood and become an adult.

In this section, Carl Tiflin is again counterpointed by a character who views life differently than the absolutist. In Sections One and Three, Billy Buck is the contrasting father/parental figure while in Section Two it is the old



paisano, Gitano. In the final episode, Jody's grandfather fulfills this vital role. An old man, he has had the experience of adventure, of crossing the plains and fighting the Indians. But that time is past now, and all that remains is talk and stories. The excitement of such a life is lost on Carl Tiflin who is content to vegetate on his farm, but Jody still possesses an interest in the heritage of this primitive and moral America. Indeed, he is fascinated by the mystery of the past and by old age and death.

Steinbeck casually mentions still other examples to parallel this fascination with death/dying. Doubletree Mutt is trying to unearth a squirrel from a hole, and the dog furiously chases a rabbit. Yet both pursuits are in vain. In fact, Steinbeck seems to be symbolically suggesting that man's efforts to categorize and understand all of life are futile since values are constantly changing. The search for absolutes can only be frustrating in a world of moral ambiguity. The color imagery reinforces this conflict as the white town of Salinas is presented in direct contrast to the oak tree which is black with crows all cawing at once (The Long Valley, p.289). The world is still ambiguous rather than absolute and is composed of opposites.

Jody's next actions also reflect his dual perception of himself and his grandfather. Grandpa is pictured as dressed in black but vividly contrasted by his white beard and eyebrows. He closely parallels Gitano of Episode Two.

similarly, Jody also recognizes the opposites in himself. He is joyful and spontaneous as a young boy when he first sights Grandfather, but later he recognizes his approaching adulthood as he slows to a dignified walk before greeting the old man. However, despite his efforts to act as an adult would, even his questions belie his childish nature as he asks Grandpa to join him in the mouse hunt.

To Grandpa, this signals the depths to which the new generation has sunk. Adventure is defined by chasing mice, not Indians, and the constant movement of the exploring generation has been replaced by sedate landowning. When Grandpa arrives at the Tiflin house, Jody's father immediately bridles at the opposite views of the old man. He is tired of repetitious talk and puts down the story-telling of Grandpa at every chance he gets. On the other hand, Jody is sympathetically drawn toward his grandfather for he, too, has felt the rejection of a father; his insides are collapsed and empty. He still admires his grandfather and his fantastic stories of the past. As Steinbeck notes, Jody "thought of the impossible world of Indians and buffaloes, a world that had ceased to be forever. He wished he could have been living in the heroic time, but he knew he was not of heroic timber" (The Long Valley, p.297). Here Steinbeck acknowledges that an earlier America was indeed admirable, but the present has somehow deteriorated and offers an inferior environment in which to mature. Instead America has changed, and Jody mourns

a past which sought out challenges, which confronted evil rather than avoided it, in which

A race of giants had lived...fearless men, men of a staunchness unknown in this day. Jody thought of the wide plains and of the wagons moving across like centipedes. He thought of Grandfather on a huge white horse, marshaling the people. Across his mind marched the great phantoms, and they marched off the earth and they were gone (The Long Valley, p.297).

The next day Jody stages his mouse hunt in an attempt to relive Grandfather's experience, but Carl Tiflin's rude comments at breakfast destroy any hope that the fantasy might be successful. He says, "Why does he have to tell them (the stories) over and over? He came across the plains. All right! Now it's finished. Nobody wants to hear about it over and over" (The Long Valley, p.299). Thus Steinbeck acknowledges the futility of trying to recapture and maintain the values of the past. Although for Jody and Grandpa the legend lives, they acknowledge Carl's practicality. As Grandpa says, "An old man doesn't see things sometimes. Maybe you're right. The crossing is finished. Maybe it should be forgotten, now it's done" (The Long Valley, p.300). As a result, Jody cancels his mouse hunt, and Grandfather ends up deciding to simply accept the sedentary life on the ranch.

Nevertheless, Grandpa, like Steinbeck, reveals his motive for story telling. "I tell those old stories, but they're not what I want to tell. I only know how I want people to feel when I tell them" (The Long Valley, p.302). The element Grandpa values about the past seems to be the

attempt of men in that age to find unity in diversity. Individuals worked together as a group and did not perceive the incongruity of the differences between their own values and those of society.

It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. I was the leader, but if I hadn't been there, someone else would have been the head. The thing had to have a head (The Long Valley, p.302).

But with the arrival at the sea, the excitement of the group died and also the dream of another leader of the people. As Grandpa says,

No place to go, Jody. Every place is taken. But that's not the worst--no, not the worst. Westering has died out of the people. Westering isn't a hunger any more. It's all done. Your father is right. It is finished" (The Long Valley, p.303).

I believe Steinbeck is here stating that early "moral America" was closely related to the events it was molded by. The end of lands to explore in some way affected the moral fiber of people and their willingness to struggle to make "right" out of "wrong." Consequently, as society's moral expectations deteriorated, Americans became more complacent and lackadaisical and continued to find "good" in the agentic.

Jody's recognition of Grandfather's sorrow leads him to an act of service far beyond his years. When he offers Grandpa a lemonade without any desire for one himself, his mother recognizes the change. It is finally an acceptance of responsibility and an outlook of hope even in despair that

steinbeck concentrates on. Jody's actions are not intended to establish precise moral judgments but to show that feeling and compassion are a means toward comprehension and understanding of everyone's human plight. (35)

I believe this analysis makes it clear that there is a unity in the collection and that the criticism of Brian Barbour that "Good stories are juxtaposed against very poor ones, and the book reveals no apparent plan and no development,"(36) is at best short-sighted. In addition, Barbour's further claim that The Long Valley shows that Steinbeck was a more "intuitive than conscious artist" also does not seem valid since the author's biography reveals him as a meticulous planner and a methodical composer.(37) Thus, given the thematic unity of moral ambiguity as outlined above, it is rather unlikely that "the collection is random, that the book lacks a center, and that stories do not comment on or deepen each other."(38)

On the contrary, I believe Steinbeck's perception of moral ambiguity and of the dilemmas caused by man's shifting reactions to "good" and "evil" are once again the key to understanding this so-called minor work and to how the collection functions as a whole rather than as random stories spliced together. The Long Valley, while it may contain what

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(35) See Astro, p.106.

(36) Barbour, p.121.

(37) Barbour, p.125.

(38) Barbour, p.118.

others may label Steinbeck's excesses, does (despite Barbour's insistence otherwise) "sound true where it is tested"; in fact, it expresses the wholeness of life in its every passage. Each tale reveals to the reader his own dilemma as a human being as he seeks for absolutes and finds none, as he struggles with his inability to define good and evil, and as he acknowledges the frustrations of living in a world of moral ambiguity.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRECIOUS BANE:

#### THE FOOL'S GOLD OF THE PEARL

Although Steinbeck had several critical successes in the intervening years of writing (1939-1946), his publication of the novella, The Pearl, only served to increase the controversy over whether Steinbeck was indeed a significant realistic novelist, or merely a didactic preacher who overindulged in melodrama, allegory, and sentimentalism. However, the extremes of reactions seem to indicate the diversity of expectations of the critics rather than a valid analysis of Steinbeck's accomplishment in this novel.

On one hand, Warren French presents a thorough denunciation of the work. Agreeing with Maxwell Geismar's initial analysis that The Pearl contains "...the quality that has marked Steinbeck's work as a whole... the sense of black and white things and good and bad things--that is to say, the sense of a fabulist or a propagandist rather than the insight of an artist...", (1) French seems to argue that Steinbeck's

allegory lacks both insight and intrinsic worth. Calling The Pearl a disappointment and a betrayal of Steinbeck's past work, French suggests that Steinbeck's decision to write the novella grew out of a desire for exposure to a wide audience in The Woman's Home Companion: "something to tap the rich resources of the never-to-be-underestimated magazines for the homemakers." (2) French then accuses Steinbeck of making "wholesale changes in his source with disastrous results" (3) and contends that the "book was made far longer than the material warranted." (4) A more serious complaint is French's belief that Steinbeck reverses and rejects viewpoints he had advanced in more substantial works. (5) According to this viewpoint, Kino is a defeated man and serves as evidence that Steinbeck is no longer interested in "man's restlessness and enlightenment." Finally, French decries the melodrama of the work and the fact that the ending does not pose a solution to the problem of Kino. In fact, he argues that the problem is not really solved and that Steinbeck leaves the weak impression at the end of The Pearl that "all is forgiven and will be forgotten... simply throwing these questions in 'the lovely green water' with the pearl: a gesture of rejection at the end [that] satisfies the reader, who feels that, after

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(1) Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity, (New York, 1958), p.152.

(2) Warren French, John Steinbeck, (New York, 1961), p.137.

(3) French, p.138.

(4) French, p.139.

(5) French, p.139-141.



all, the simple life is best."(6)

French's ultimate contention is that The Pearl is a decline in Steinbeck's work, and that, in the final analysis, it is merely a paste substitute rather than a valuable treasure. Ironically, this negative viewpoint is countered by Howard Levant, whose usual reaction to Steinbeck, at least structurally, is very critical and negative. Surprisingly, however, Levant is an ardent defender of the novella, praising Steinbeck's ability to drive "an apparent simple narrative into the darkest areas of human awareness," and noting that "he accomplishes his purpose with full credibility."(7) He also praises The Pearl for exhibiting "a compact precision, a completeness in the Aristotelian sense, and the force of convincing thematic materials."(8) As Levant notes,

The key to the narrative method is balance. A spare, impersonal narration concentrates the richly implicational materials. Particularly the pearl suggests various meanings to different people at different times. The highly suggestive quality of the precise object, the pearl, keeps the narrative from collapsing into a narrowed allegory.(9)

Disagreeing with French, Levant sees the ending as an

anthropomorphic form of penance, a ritual burial, an ejection of evil, a token of a return to the genuine life of the organism, shaded by the fact of death which no human act can alter. The resolution is ambiguous, then, like the rest of the parable, for it echoes our flawed

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(6)French, p.142.

(7)Howard Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study, (Kansas City, MO, 1974), p.194.

(8)Levant, p.185.

(9)Levant, p.185.

humanity... Which is to say that The Pearl is a triumph, a successful rendering of human experience in the round, in the most economical and intense of forms, without any surrender to the simplified or imposed patterns that mar the conclusions of such different novels as Tortilla Flat or The Grapes of Wrath.(10)

On the other hand, some critics have taken neither extreme. Instead, they have over-simplified the message of the novella and found it merely a denunciation of materialistic society and of the church. For example, F.W. Watt concluded that it was inspired by a "revulsion against modern industrial and commercial society, and embodied a strong critical attack, direct or indirect, on the way and values of American civilization."(11) Still others saw the portrayal of Catholicism as emphasizing greed and corruption; moreover, the church was associated with the established system which fostered inequality and justified it in the name of religious traditions. Surprisingly, however, only a few Steinbeck scholars such as Lisca, Slochower, and Pratt, have praised the complex moral issues which Steinbeck attempts to confront and delineate in his parable/tale. Slochower groups Steinbeck with Andre Malraux and Thomas Mann as authors who

look back to history and myth for the prototypes of human fate. But they reach back not out of love for the dark night, as is the case with anti-intellectualism, but because with Freud and Marx, they seek the categories which on a higher level chart a liberating future... they are for these men the promises of continuity and recurrence. Their work reclaims our faith in the

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(10) Levant, pp.195-197.

(11) Frank W. Watt, John Steinbeck, (New York, 1962), p.84.

rationality of man's natural history. It is a kind of moral-esthetic counterpoint to the physical disorder of our day. Their art is the contemporary secular equivalent of man's divinity.(12)

Indeed a close reading of the novella supports Levant's contention that "Duality undergirds The Pearl, and irony is the specific literary device that finds duality in every part of the narrative,"(13) ; in fact it becomes obvious that moral ambiguity is again the center of a relatively unappreciated Steinbeck masterpiece.

The core idea for Steinbeck's The Pearl, like that for the Pastures of Heaven and "The Snake," came from an actual incident. While Steinbeck and Ricketts were traveling on the Sea of Cortez, examining and collecting biological specimens, they heard the tale of a young man. Steinbeck's account of the tale is found in The Log from The Sea of Cortez, where he labels it as something

far too reasonable to be true...An event which happened at La Paz in recent years is typical of such places. An Indian boy by accident found a pearl of great size, an unbelievable pearl. He knew its value was so great that he need never work again. In his one pearl he had the ability to be drunk as long as he wished, to marry any one of a number of girls, and to make many more a little happy too. In his great pearl lay salvation, for he could in advance purchase masses sufficient to pop him out of Purgatory like a squeezed watermelon seed. In addition he could shift a number of dead relatives a little nearer to Paradise. He went to La Paz with his pearl in his hand and his future clear into eternity in his heart. He took his pearl to a broker and was offered so little that he

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(12)Peter Lisca, The Wide World of Steinbeck, (New Brunswick, N.J.,1958), p.230.

(13)Levant, p.197.

grew angry, for he knew he was cheated. Then he carried his pearl to another broker and was offered the same amount. After a few more visits he came to know that the brokers were only the many hands of one head and that he could not sell his pearl for more. He took it to the beach and hid it under a stone, and that night he was clubbed into unconsciousness and his clothing was searched. The next night he slept at the house of a friend and his friend and he were injured and bound and the whole house searched. Then he went inland to lose his pursuers and he was waylaid and tortured. But he was very angry now and he knew what he must do. Hurt as he was he crept back to La Paz in the night and he skulked like a hunted fox to the beach and took out his pearl from under the stone. Then he cursed it and threw it as far as he could into the channel. He was a free man again with his soul in danger and his food and shelter insecure. And he laughed a great deal about it.(14)

This core story, as expanded and elucidated by Steinbeck, became the basis for the novella first entitled The Pearl of Great Price and later shortened to The Pearl. Like "Flight," a later short story in The Long Valley, it is the story of initiation, of Kino's induction into the evil of the world and of his realization of the duality of human existence, especially when moral actions are considered.

The description of Kino and his little family that begins Chapter 1 offers an Edenic picture of peace and contentment despite the obvious problems of poverty. The beauty and good of his life is first reflected in the harmony of music - "he would have called the tune he heard 'The Song of the Family.'" Obviously it is positive music and its lyric melody reflects the tranquility and positive quality of Kino's

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(14) John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, (New York, 1951), pp.102-103.

union with his wife Juana and his baby son, Coyotito. Later, however, this musical theme becomes a central image in the novel, and eventually, the clash of different melodies and sounds will indicate Kino's despair at ever being able to achieve harmony in his world. Such contrapuntal music is all the more significant as a sign of moral ambiguity when one considers Steinbeck's fascination with Bach's Art of the Fugue, and the fact that one of his unpublished novels was entitled Dissonant Symphony. In addition, his comments in Journal of a Novel, when discussing repetitive themes and reversals of them, also indicates his sensitivity to the similarities of music and prose. Thus, by using both sound and sights to reiterate his central message, I believe that Steinbeck manages to reinforce his perception of duality on many levels instead of just one.

For example, the initial visual description of Juana's and Kino's Paradise is bathed in light, and Kino's first sight images are described as follows:

Behind him Juana's fire leaped into flame and threw spears of light through the chinks of the brush-house wall and threw a wavering square of light out the door...The dawn came quickly now, a wash, a glow, a lightness, and then an explosion of fire as the sun arose out of the Gulf.(15)

Not surprisingly, this initial light/darkness imagery remains solidly prevalent in the rest of the novel. Yet despite the

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(15)John Steinbeck, The Pearl, (New York, 1945),p. 4. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parenthesis within the text of this paper.

positive beginning of a new day and light-conquering darkness, there are other early indications that this optimistic viewpoint is not absolute.

One example of such flexible optimism is the ancient song Juana sings. It is said to have only three notes and yet an endless variety of interval. Although it signifies safety, warmth and wholeness, it is significant that the song sometimes rises to an aching chord that catches in the throat. Similarly, as Kino awakens, there is yellow sunlight on the house, yet the narrator makes the reader aware that the dark poisonous air still threatens.

Specifically, the evil is symbolized in a scorpion, an animal that starts a new dissonant tune, a song of evil, which threatens the harmony and Edenic peace of the family. Instinctively, Juana and Kino resort to a variety of techniques to ward off the evil. Recognizing the fragile quality of religion, they use both an ancient magic spell and a "Hail, Mary" to curb the scorpion's threat. Yet evil is like fate; it is impossible to escape, and though Kino makes every effort to destroy it, Coyotito's chance movement of the cradle rope causes the deadly insect to fall and sting him.

Kino's fury has no bounds as he smashes the evil into paste, but he recognizes that the poison has already infected the child, and his fury at the now dead scorpion is helpless. Yet Juana thoughtfully attempts to remove the poison in a primitive manner. As she sucks the venom from the bite,

however, she begins to recognize the need for further care. She even dares to think of approaching the structured society of the city and of consulting a doctor who normally only cares for the rich.

This potential excursion from the primitive inexperienced lifestyle to the hostile environment of the hardened city marks the beginning of Juana's and Kino's perception of the duality of mankind. Previously their simplistic lifestyle had prohibited such an insight; they saw blacks and whites instead of grays. As Juana and Kino approach the doctor's house, however, Steinbeck makes his reader very aware of the duplicity of the doctor's personality. Although he is looked to as the source of cure, he is actually the epitome of evil. As the watchers of the procession observe the doctor, the narrator states:

They knew his ignorance, his cruelty, his avarice, his appetites, his sins. They knew his clumsy abortions and the little brown pennies he gave sparingly for alms. They had seen his corpses go into the church (The Pearl, p.10).

In fact, Kino's own reaction to appealing to such a man is also filled with ambiguity.

Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time. Rage and terror went together. He could kill the doctor more easily than he could talk to him, for all of the doctor's race spoke to all of Kino's race as though they were simple animals (The Pearl, p.11).

Kino's reaction here is motivated by an inferiority complex unfairly imposed by a stronger race. The Spanish doctor and the pearl buyers have assumed that they are innately better

than the poor natives. Their moral code and their value system will also be considered dominant because of the power, prestige, and money they control. As a result, Kino feels trapped by his own ignorance and by the doctor's greed. He becomes cautious and suspicious, fearing everyone, knowing that the "gods" are hostile to his plans.(16) Like early opponents of Calvinistic predestination, he is frustrated by being doomed to destruction by a simultaneously incomprehensible yet just and blameless judgment of God.(17) Thus even when Kino doffs his hat in respect to the doctor's position and authority, he still senses in him the music of the enemy.

Evil and good are also inseparably intertwined in the color imagery that accompanies this section. For example, Steinbeck states, "The glaring sun threw the bunched shadows of the people blackly on the white wall" (The Pearl, p.11). However, he clearly suggests that the issues at hand are nowhere near as clearly delineated; they are neither white nor black.

The symbolism of setting continues in the description of the furnishings of the doctor's residence. Here Steinbeck once more reinforces a mixture of evil and good in the physical setting. Although the furniture and household

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(16)See Martha Heasley Cox, "Steinbeck's The Pearl," in A Study Guide to Steinbeck: A Handbook to His Major Works, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Metuchen, N.J., 1974), p.116.

(17)Calvin, Vol.II, ch. xxi, p.211.



decorations are heavy and dark and gloomy, they are relieved by the religious pictures which hang on the wall. The narrator goes on to state that whereas Kino, up to this point, has observed only the positive side of life, the doctor has been similarly obsessed with its negative. His desires are for the past for he

had once for a short time been a part of the great world and his whole subsequent life was memory and longing for France. "That," he said, "was civilized living"--by which he meant that on a small income he had been able to keep a mistress and eat in restaurants (The Pearl, p.12).

Considering this, he is contemptuous of treating "animal" like Indians who are unable to pay for his skill. Not surprisingly, he finds an excuse to avoid caring for the child, and Kino, publicly shamed by the doctor's abusive refusal, strikes out futilely at the newfound evil. He replaces his suppliant hat, indicating he will no longer defer to the doctor's power and in rage he strikes the doctor's iron gate, ironically hurting no one but himself.

Steinbeck begins Chapter 2 with another of his biological descriptions. In it he parallels the previous human actions by pointing out that nature is also deceptive and ambiguous. For example, he notes that poison fish hide carefully in the eel grass and that dogs and pigs seek to feed off the dead. When coupled with the physical description cited above, these details suggest that in both animal and human there is an undefined line between the real and the unreal. Steinbeck describes everything as a hazy mirage, but

I believe that he is also picturing the frustrating and complicated problem of human decision-making. Clear-cut answers are not available, for just as fog distorts the perception of natural things, so inconsistency of actions makes man unsure of the motives of others.

The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted; so that sea and land had the sharp clarities and the vagueness of a dream...There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there (The Pearl, pp.14-15).

Since nothing is sure and solid, and everything is vague and uncertain, Juana and Kino again resort to primitive ways to solve their problem. Kino will search for a pearl to pay the doctor, while Juana will rely on the folk medicine of brown seaweed. Once again Steinbeck inserts a criticism of materialistic society as he notes that Juana's remedy "lacked authority because it was simple and didn't cost anything" (The Pearl, p.15), and he seems to suggest that "civilized" mankind has less humanity than their supposed "primitive" brothers. Yet Juana's reliance on and belief in the doctor remains despite his harsh treatment of Kino. Her "mind-set" refuses to change or disturb the stereotypical image she has of his ability and, despite the evil he stands for, she senses that he can provide good. Moral ambiguity and duality abound in these perceptions and as Steinbeck notes, "the minds of people are as unsubstantial as the mirage of the Gulf" (The Pearl, p.16).

The story proceeds to the oyster beds where Kino will look for a pearl. Ironically, Steinbeck points out that this source of wealth has often been misused. "This was the bed that had raised the King of Spain to be a great power in Europe in past years, had helped to pay for his wars, and had decorated the churches for his soul's sake" (The Pearl, p. 16). In fact, Steinbeck includes an even more ironic fact as he discusses how a pearl develops. It is initially only an irritating grain of sand which by accident is coated with smooth cement. In its beginning it is a worthless irritant while later it becomes a treasured beauty. Again the duality of all living things is stressed.

Steinbeck returns to music to indicate his theme as Kino sings the Song of the Family. However, in it he now finds a secret little inner song, "hardly perceptible, but always there, sweet and secret and clinging, almost hiding in the counter-melody, and this was the Song of the Pearl That Might Be" (The Pearl, p.17). The new tune begins in harmony with the original song of the family, but as the novel progresses, a more dissonant inharmonic melody is produced as the opposing pitches begin to clash with the "cantus firmus" of the first voice. Again the family relies on luck, "a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both" (The Pearl, p.17). Steinbeck even asserts that chance is against their discovery; for good is not an absolute which is acquired by patient religiosity but by magic. Nevertheless, Juana and Kino persist in trying

to force and tear luck out of the god's hands. (The Pearl, p.17) When a large oyster is found, however, Kino realizes that the opposite also is true. "It is not good to want a thing too much. It sometimes drives the luck away. You must want it just enough, and you must be very tactful with God or the gods" (The Pearl, p.19). Kino is faced with the same dilemma that Calvin proclaimed in The Institutes: "Man dare not glory in anything he has, however small, without glorying against God and deducting from His glory." (18)

The ghostly gleam seen in the large oyster indicates its dual nature , and it is not surprising that Kino does not trust his perceptions. "What he had seen, he knew, might be a reflection, a piece of flat shell accidentally drifted in or a complete illusion. In this Gulf of uncertain light there were more illusions than realities" (The Pearl, p.20). But when the oyster is opened the perfection of the pearl overshadows its inherent evil. It is a "great pearl, perfect as the moon. It captured the light and refined it and gave it back in silver incandescence. It was as large as a sea-gull's egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world" (The Pearl, p.20). At this point, Kino's reactions are also described in terms of opposites. Although he hears the music of the pearl as "clear, beautiful, rich, warm and lovely," it is also "glowing, gloating, and triumphant," qualities which have

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(18) Calvin, Vol. II, ch.XIII, pp. 68-69.

negative aspects (The Pearl, p.20). Here for the first time, beautiful music appears harsh and destructive, but in a reversal of previous works, where good is overcome by evil, the immensity of the positive tune drowns out its negatives. As a result, a string of good luck begins as the couple notes that the poison is receding from Coyotito's body. However, this "good" luck is not universal; it does not apply to all.

For example, it is ironic that the oyster must die for the pearl to have life in the world. Similarly, the new "life" which the pearl offers to Kino and Juana is by no means guaranteed when one considers the biblical warning of I Timothy 6:10, "The love of money is the root of all evil." A particular dilemma arises for Kino at this point because now he is no longer obligated to use the pearl as he had planned in order to purchase restored health for Coyotito. Juana and Kino are entrapped in the pearl's dual nature: Will it be a force for good or bad in their lives? The good motive of gaining the pearl has been removed, and the possibility remains that it may even cause Kino to become as corrupt as the evil doctor.

Indeed, that process of induction into evil begins in Chapter 3 when the town discovers that Kino has found the Pearl of the World. Materialistic concerns occupy the minds of all the townspeople as they try to fathom how they can best benefit from the discovery. Steinbeck even portrays selfishness in the church as he describes the spreading news.

"It came to the priest walking in the garden, and it put a thoughtful look in his eyes and a memory of certain repairs necessary to the church" (The Pearl, p.22). I believe Steinbeck here delineates another ambiguity. He recognizes the corruption of the organized church and summarily denounces it. As in The Grapes of Wrath, organized religious groups seem to have lost contact with truly Christian principles.

But he also is entranced with the church's potential for good in religious people and he envisions, as Calvin did, the "reformed" church (the corporate body), capable of the perfection of the saints through individual adherence to the Word of God.(19) The reputation of the church is dual and transient. Its shifting reputation parallels the dual perception of Kino by the community. His treasure makes him instantly popular, and suddenly Kino's position in the community changes much as Danny's did in Steinbeck's earlier novel, Tortilla Flat. Although his monetary wealth brings him both fame and friendship, both are transitory.

Steinbeck reinforces the concept of moral corruption and duplicity by his presentation of the real motives of such new-found friends as contrasted with their professed good will to Kino. Steinbeck also points out that though outwardly there seems to be competition among the buyers, "there was only one, and he kept these agents in separate offices to give

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(19)See Calvin, Vol. II, ch.II, pp.304-314.

a semblance of competition" (The Pearl, p.23). Though good had happened to Kino, envy, jealousy, and hate perverts approval by the town. The narrator notes that

The essence of pearl mixed with essence of men and a curious dark residue was precipitated. Every man suddenly became related to Kino's pearl, and Kino's pearl went into the dreams, the speculations, the schemes, the plans, the futures, the wishes, the needs, the lusts, the hungers, of everyone, and only one person stood in the way and that was Kino, so that he became curiously every man's enemy (The Pearl, p.23).

Steinbeck captures this new mood of the group animal concisely. Its lust for money and success causes it to seek the destruction of fellow men. Thus the town takes on the evil qualities of the pearl and of the scorpion.

The news stirred up something infinitely black and evil in the town; the black distillate was like the scorpion, or like hunger in the smell of food, or like loneliness when love is withheld. The poison sacs of the town began to manufacture venom, and the town swelled and puffed with the pressure of it (The Pearl, pp.23-24).

Yet, in typical primitive naivete, Kino and Juana are unaware of the two-faced nature of the townspeople. Instead, they are warm and happy in their newfound success and good luck. The music of "the pearl had merged with the music of the family so that one beautified the other" (The Pearl, p.24).

The pearl also causes Kino to dream. Although he has been satisfied with his world up to this point, the value of the pearl opens many new vistas for him. He envisions for himself the things society values - a recognition of his marital status by the church, new clothes that would display his elegance, and ultimately weapons, a harpoon and rifle that

would assert his new-found power in society. The pearl's symbolism expands again; this time it symbolizes freedom from a fisherman's life of bondage to the sea, and Kino believes it will secure entrance through education for his child, into a dimly-seen better life.(20)

Once this barrier has been broken, Kino goes on to dream of other things. At this point Steinbeck notes the irony and duplicity of man's lack of satisfaction since up to this point Kino and Juana had been happy with what little they had. As the narrator describes this trait, it is a paradox, a positive and a negative at the same time.

For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. And this is said in disparagement, whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have (The Pearl, p.25).

Once again Steinbeck demonstrates that evil and good are inextricably mixed. Yet for Kino, the good of the pearl is preeminent. It will not only provide physical luxuries, but it will provide education for Coyotito, a learning that will liberate and free him from his present state of poverty and from the plight of his father's ignorance. I believe Kino's acts here would be seen in Calvinistic terms as extenuating the sins of Adam by allowing ambition and pride to combine with ingratitude; by longing for more than was allowed to him,

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(20)See Lester Marks, Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck, (The Hague, 1969), p.106.



Kino manifests contempt for the great liberality with which God has already enriched him.(21)

Although all of Kino's positive dreams are reflected in the light of the pearl,(22) its ownership breeds not only dreams but nightmares. In fact, just as suddenly Kino becomes afraid and abruptly cuts off the pearl's light. It is immediately enveloped in darkness.

The power of the pearl is also perceived by Kino's neighbors. They too sense that it is a turning point and that time will now date from Kino's pearl, but they also recognize that Kino's fortunes may go either up or down as a result of the pearl. In retrospect, society will be able to see the finding as positive or negative depending on the eventual outcome. Kino will become either a man transfigured by power and greatness or a madman who tested God by rebelling against the way things are (The Pearl, p.26).

The ambiguous nature of the treasure is again evident. Light and dark imagery return at this point as Juana "goes to the fire hole and digs a coal from the ashes and breaks a few twigs over it and fans a flame alive" (The Pearl, p.27). Kino's safe primitive world and its values are now almost nonexistent. Yet, at the same time as Juana kindles the fire, Steinbeck notes that the dark is almost in, a threatening dark that eventually will bring the first attempt to steal the

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(21)See Calvin, Vol. I, ch. I, p.213.

(22)See Frank Watt, John Steinbeck (New York, 1962),p. 86.

pearl. But before this tragedy occurs, Steinbeck satirizes the church's duality, also using color imagery. The priest is described as "a graying aging man with an old skin and a young sharp eye" (The Pearl, p.27) In typical moral ambiguity, the priest flatters Kino while, at the same time, reiterating the music of evil (The Pearl, p.27). Although Kino attributes the song to his neighbors instead of the priest, it is obvious that the money has corrupted the father as well as the rest of society. Like T.S. Eliot's Fourth Tempter in Murder in the Cathedral, he presents Kino with the last temptation, which is the greatest treason "to do the right thing for the wrong reason." (23)

When the priest leaves, the music of evil is "shrilling in his [Kino's] ears" opposing the sweet sounds of the pearl. The contrapuntal sounds again indicate the importance of the music imagery. For the first time, Kino senses the immensity of his opposition. "He felt alone and unprotected, and scraping crickets and croaking toads seemed to be carrying the melody of evil" (The Pearl, p.28). Even the smallest animals in Kino's immediate surroundings are infected with the sounds of corruption, greed, and jealousy, perversions of the potential good of the pearl. Yet, at this point, Kino becomes even more determined that he will not be robbed of the treasure which still is warm and smooth against his skin.

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(23) T.S. Eliot, "Murder in the Cathedral," in The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950), (New York, 1962), Pt. 1, p.96.

Formerly, he believed that The Song of the Family, and its warmth and security would be sufficient protection, but he is now more aware of the opposition to his dream. "Other forces were set up to destroy it and this he knew, so that he had to prepare to meet the attack" (The Pearl, p.29).

The arrival of the doctor shortly after the departure of the priest reinforces the moral ambiguity of both the church and rich society. While previously he could not be bothered at all, the doctor now is motivated by Kino's new circumstances to an unheard of house call. He reasons that his work will merit a reward, and he indulges in "kindness" to Kino out of selfish reasons, a hope for profit and gain.(24) Drawing on the ignorance of Kino and Juana in terms of medical facts, he plants a fear that Coyotito's recovery may not be permanent. At this point, the doctor hopes to overcome Kino's double perception of him. He relies on the fact that Kino's respect for a title and tools will overcome his initial misgiving and mistrust based on his previous actions. The pearl's symbolism now expands even further as the baby Coyotito is identified as the real pearl and precious possession of his family. His health is obviously valued more highly than the inanimate pearl. Consequently Kino is unsure of what is "right" or "wrong" to do in order to save his Pearl, his son.(25) Kino, of course, is trapped by the ploy of

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(24)See Calvin, Vol. II, ch. XVIII, pp.119-121.

(25)See Levant, p.192-194.

the doctor and is confused by his ambiguous feelings toward him. Eventually, as the doctor announces his diagnosis of a possible return of the poison and points out symptoms, Steinbeck portrays moral bankruptcy at its height. The doctor is relying on his duplicity to scare the poor natives and to attain his own evil goals. Therefore, he prescribes a "medicine" and predicts a crisis for the child within a few hours. The reader, however, like Juana and Kino, cannot help but wonder if the prescription itself is not the "evil" masquerading as good. Again reality is clouded with what may be true. The Song of Evil triumphs when the child does indeed become ill and "uncertainty was in Kino, and the music of evil throbbed in his head and nearly drove out Juana's song" (The Pearl, p.33). At this point, the music imagery surely hints at the unhappy events which will follow.

When the doctor returns and claims to have affected a cure, his first question is about his fee. Although the rumor of Kino's pearl has spread throughout the village, the doctor pretends he has not heard of the find and generously offers safekeeping for the treasure. Yet despite this outward show of concern, the doctor's real motive is evil, to find Kino's hiding place for the pearl and then make plans to steal the treasure. Subsequently, due to a large extent to his conniving ways, the crafty physician succeeds in getting Kino to reveal, however furtively, where the pearl has been hidden. So called "good" intentions have once more been shown to be a

cover-up for an evil motive.

During the closing pages of Chapter 3, Kino becomes almost paranoid with fear. "He smelled the breeze and he listened for any foreign sound of secrecy or creeping, and his eyes searched the darkness for the music of evil was sounding in his head, and he was fierce and afraid" (The Pearl, p.35). The formerly dominant song of joy and happiness is being drowned out by the evil inherent in Kino's manic desire to keep the pearl. Since everyone around him is a potential thief, the joy of good and beauty is slowly creeping out of Kino's life. He is being initiated into the evil of the world; his previous naivete is destroyed. Steinbeck describes him like the pearl itself, no longer human. Like the oyster, he has been infected by the sand of mistrust and fear and he can "feel the shell of hardness drawing over him" (The Pearl, p.35) as he festers with evil.

This inhumanity is illustrated in the progression of several recurring events. First of all, Kino is associated with the predatory world of nature and with the oyster and its pearl. Each comparison indicates the duality of the animal world and the moral ambiguity of its actions. Similarly, in Kino's dream which follows, darkness comes, enveloping and darkening his hopes for an education for Coyotito. The potential of the pearl is now questionable and when Kino awakens every sound is an indicator of a dark thing. "The whisper of a foot on dry earth and the scratch of fingers in

the soil" (The Pearl, p.36). This darkness breeds evil on Kino and causes him to react to the invaders of his home as an animal would. "He sprang like an angry cat, leaped, striking and spitting for the dark thing he knew was in the corner of the house" (The Pearl, p.36). Eventually this direct association of Kino with an animal counterpart will be expanded as he moves away from "civilized" action and into the primitive violence of the jungle in order to keep his treasure. The kind considerate father has been transformed into a raging beast or a primitive savage, who is ready to kill to keep its treasure. "He struck at it with a knife, missed and then felt his knife go through cloth" (The Pearl, p.36).

Momentarily, at least, the dark force is held off, and light returns in a flame of cornhusks and a little piece of consecrated candle. However, the event has again caused the growth of hate and evil in Kino. Steinbeck parallels its growth with the pearl's increase in size and worth. "...his eyes and his voice were hard and cold and a brooding hate was growing in him" (The Pearl, p.37). Shortly thereafter, Juana is the first to recognize that the pearl is not merely a treasure of good, but that it also motivates and causes a wealth of sin.

"This thing is evil," she cried harshly. "This pearl is like a sin! It will destroy us. Throw it away, Kino. Let us break it between stones. Let us bury it and forget the place. Let us throw it back into the sea. It has brought evil. Kino, my husband, it will destroy us" (The

Pearl, p.37).

When she screams her fear to Kino, his reply is adamant; he still refuses to see the duality of such a treasure, no matter how obvious the illustrations may be. When the pearl has been converted to money, he feels all will be well. Simplistically he rebukes Juana. "Hush! Do not speak any more. In the morning we will sell the pearl, and then the evil will be gone, and only the good remain" (The Pearl, p.37). Although the reality of the blood on his knife still confronts Kino as he observes the pearl before dawn, the narrator observes that he is still able to drown out the evil with the good. "The beauty of the pearl, winking and glimmering in the light of the little candle, cozened his brain with its beauty. So lovely it was, so soft, and its own music came from it..." (The Pearl, pp.37-38). Yet, Steinbeck continues to suggest the pearl's trickery in the word "cozened" and, although Juana and Kino still are able to smile at the end of this chapter, the reader is being led by Steinbeck to see that their optimism is unfounded. Perfection will not be reached, and oneness will not remain if the pearl is kept.

As Chapter 4 opens, Steinbeck again emphasizes the hostility of group man to the individual who does not conform.

If every single man and woman, child and baby, acts and conducts itself in a known pattern and breaks no walls and differs with no one and experiments in no way and is not sick and does not endanger the town, then that unit can disappear and never be heard of. But let one man step out of the regular thought or the known and trusted pattern, and the nerves of the townspeople ring with nervousness

and communication travels over the nerve lines of the town. Then every unit communicates to the whole (The Pearl, p.39).

Steinbeck here associates man with the instincts of pack animals, who at the slightest hint of individual defects turn on their own and devour them. The duality of the pearl is again stressed since although it is seen as good by the townspeople, its owner suffers as a result of keeping it. Out of Kino's good fortune grow envy, jealousy, hate, and a wish for his destruction.(26) Ironically it is also here that Steinbeck first identifies the town's name. It is La Paz, symbolically standing for peace, even as Kino, the given name of the protagonist, recalls a great father of the church who tamed the desert and sweetened the minds of the people.(27) However, both the names also suggest their opposites. Although it is a minor detail, I believe it is yet another way that Steinbeck communicates moral ambiguity in The Pearl. The town only brings confusion and dissent, and Kino's succeeding actions hardly bring about sweetness and light.

Duality is also suggested in Steinbeck's presentation of the pearl buyers. Though their techniques are crooked and evil, they ironically find joy and satisfaction in duping the poor. "For every man in the world functions to the best of his ability, and no one does less than his best, no matter

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(26)See Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York, 1963), p.114.

(27)Cox, p.115.



what we may think about it!"(The Pearl, p.40). In addition, a similar ambiguity is revealed in the neighbors who do not own the pearl. Although they speak piously of the good deeds they would promote if the pearl was theirs, the reader questions the sincerity of their proposals. Would not the "evil limbs of greed, hatred and coldness" equally destroy them if they actually possessed the treasure? (The Pearl, p.41).

Kino's reaction to his find, however, is still positive. He actually continues to believe that his dreams will come true when the pearl is sold. He will have acquired culture, class, respectability, education in one fell swoop. He does not reckon with or listen to the voice of experience, his brother, Juan Thomas, who tells Kino that he must beware of being cheated since neither of them knows a fair price. Instead, Kino reasons that justice might be available at the capital, but that it has never been attained because no man could be trusted to take the pearls to market there. The temptation for theft is always too great and reluctantly the village has relied upon the tried and true system which, in reality, is another example of duality, a cheating monopoly, carefully disguised as free enterprise.

The narrator contends that wishing for such reforms or seeking to escape the inherent duality of the world is hopeless. Such hopes will continually result in punishment from God for those who try to leave their station or try to establish a rigid code that applies to all men. In a fallen

society there is no equality and justice; only the rich prosper, and they use their status to justify the plight of the poor.

And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell (The Pearl, p.43).

Here the possession of worldly goods and the blessing of divine providence are used in a negative sense to justify discrimination against the poor who, because of their poverty, are not seen as the elect and are therefore inferior.(28) Similarly, Steinbeck also suggests here that the sense of inferiority that the white man inflicts on the Indians is essential in also defining "correct" moral codes, despite the equal demands that another culture may have for its value system. The strength and power of a white society deliberately ignores these different demands because they represent a weaker race. Kino's rights can be easily proved wrong by such a society and, basically, their desire for pearls motivates just that approach. They will do their best to defraud him and to prevent his obtaining a lawful price. His idea of right will be proved wrong. They will not allow even the simplest indication to be given that they are awed by the pearl. Instead, they will use reverse psychology to

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(28)See Calvin, Vol. II, ch. X, pp.31-35 and ch.XII, pp.62,66.

suggest that the Pearl of the World is merely fool's gold, too large, an object of curiosity, clumsy, worth only 1000, not 50,000, pesos (The Pearl, p.46). Bolstered by the monopoly, a group determined to repeat the same lie, the first pearl dealer is confident that his inadequate price will eventually be accepted. The poor Indians have no other choice. In fact, Kino even begins to doubt his treasure and thinks that perhaps the buyer's pronouncement was the truth. Certainly one thousand pesos is not a trivial sum to a poor peasant.

But, despite his insecurity, Kino becomes more tight and hard, rather than more pliable. He is again associated with the glowing pearl which coagulates with evil and entraps its victim with its glistening yet deadly light. Critic Todd Lieber reaffirms its ambiguous nature by stating,

it is a complex talisman, containing Steinbeck's vision of man: it is a thing of great worth and beauty and promise, but it also appears cancerous and ugly; it evokes avarice and greed, but also generosity and kindness; it produces high and noble thoughts and ambition, but also theft and murder. [In fact,] In his middle years Steinbeck had come to believe that good and evil were inseparable from being, intimately related parts of that which is.(29)

However, Lieber does not acknowledge Kino's intense identification with the talisman. For example, Steinbeck here describes Kino as feeling the evil coagulating about him; consequently, he is helpless to protect himself. Kino, like the pearl, exhibits man's dilemma of duality of being unable

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(29) Todd Lieber, "Talismanic Patterns in the Novels of John Steinbeck," American Literature, XLIV (1972), 269.

to adequately distinguish and separate good from evil. Thus when the pearl dealers press their luck by suggesting that the pearl is of no worth at all, Kino recaptures the fierce tenacity of his first fight to keep the treasure and he vows not to be cheated, even if he must take his pearl to the capital. Enraged, he pushes his way out of the crowd, leaving his neighbors confused by the action, unwilling to admit that if there was duplicity among the dealers, then "all of us have been cheated all of our lives" (The Pearl, p.49).

In typical moral ambiguity, the town's opinions of Kino's actions are varied. Some believe his actions to be right, some wrong; some wise, some incredibly stupid. Yet Kino recognizes the ultimate effect of his act. "He had lost one world and had not gained another" (The Pearl, p.49). Even Juan Thomas questions Kino about his rash behavior. He argues that if injustice occurs, it is survivable because man recognizes it is inherent in society. He says, "...You have defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you" (The Pearl, p.50). He recognizes that even though Kino may be in the right, his position is tenuous and fragile. Even friends and relatives will defect from his cause if they are threatened by danger and discomfort.

Yet Kino does not succumb to the inevitable defeat. He is only momentarily stunned. "A lethargy had settled on him, and a little gray hopelessness. Every road seemed blocked

against him. In his head he heard only the dark music of the enemy" (The Pearl, p.51). However, his senses are still burningly alive and, with Juana's help singing the melody of the family, safety, warmth, and wholeness are still able to be maintained. Juana keeps the evil out; "Her voice was brave against the threat of the dark music" (The Pearl, p.51). I believe that the musical imagery here indicates Steinbeck's early attempt at suggesting that if good is strong enough, it has the potential to overcome evil, not just stay on equal terms with it.

However, paranoia again returns as Kino senses "the wary, watchful evil outside the brush house. He could feel the dark creeping things waiting for him to go out into the night. It was shadowy and dreadful and yet it called to him and threatened him and challenged him" (The Pearl, p.51). When he confronts this darkness, his animal nature returns, and once more the bestial murderous actions surface. Juana again voices her distrust in the pearl. "Kino, the pearl is evil. Let us destroy it before it destroys us. Let us crush it between stones. Let us - let us throw it back in the sea where it belongs! Kino, it is evil, it is evil!" (The Pearl, p.52). But despite Juana's pleas, Kino insists he will conquer. He calls himself a man but the term has double implications of good and evil, of determination and stubbornness, of justice and injustice, of ingenuity and craft. Like Pepe Torres in "Flight," Kino will soon discern

that his claim to manhood contains just as many flaws as it does virtues.

As Chapter 5 begins, the emphasis of Steinbeck on moral ambiguity increases as Juana, desiring to save the family and Kino, decides to destroy the pearl. However, this action, though motivated by a desire for good, is seen as evil by Kino. Juana is described as "black in the doorway" (The Pearl, p.55), and Kino's brain is red with anger. The separation of the two is complete when Kino hits her in the face with his clenched fist and kicks her in the side.

Both characters have become like animals in their quest for the power and glory of riches. As in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck's animal symbolism distinguishes between the predator and the prey. Kino is the former, Juana the latter. For example, Kino's teeth are bared and he hisses like a snake, and Juana is like a sheep before a butcher (The Pearl, p.55). Yet Juana persists in accepting Kino's manhood and its resulting contradiction - that he is half insane and half god. Eventually she rationalizes her punishment and supports her husband even though she feels he is wrong. At this point, she hopes to balance his masculinity with the quality of woman, her reason, caution and sense of preservation. Yet despite her strength and insight, she is unable to convince Kino who is the epitome of mankind: stubborn, domineering, and unwilling to change his mind once he has committed himself to an absolute. At this point Juana does not despair however;

she merely adjusts her viewpoint, trying to agree with her husband in order to avoid further divisiveness in their relationship.

Thus, after Kino has been attacked and the pearl wrenched from his hands onto the pathway, she retrieves the treasure, despite the the negative consequences she fears. Kino, however, has killed a man in order to save his precious pearl, and the potential good he anticipated has turned to evil. The old peace, the time before the pearl, is gone; lost with it are the dreams for success and advancement. All that remains is flight.

But even this option is thwarted by evil as Kino finds his canoe destroyed. Again Kino regresses, and Steinbeck predictably returns to animal imagery. "There was sorrow in Kino's rage but this last thing had tightened him beyond breaking. He was an animal now, for hiding, for attacking, and he lived only to preserve himself and his family" (The Pearl, p.58). The setting also reflects this ominous change as Steinbeck pictures "a weak moon [that] was losing its light and clouds [that] thickened and curdled southward. The wind blew freshly into the estuary, a nervous, restless wind with the smell of storm on its breath, and there was change and uneasiness in the air" (The Pearl, p.58). Nothing is safe in this new world.

The dark ones even fire Kino's brush house, and he becomes afraid of the light which now has negative rather than

positive characteristics. In a passage reminiscent of Joseph Conrad, Steinbeck has Kino reflect on the murder. Like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, he tells Juan Tomas, "It is all darkness - all darkness and the shape of darkness" (The Pearl, p.60). The evil of the pearl has infected Kino, just as the ivory and the natives perverted Kurtz. Like Marlowe and Kurtz, Conrad's protagonists, Juana and Kino are enveloped "by the darkness of the houses," and as Juan Tomas points out, "It is the pearl. There is a devil in the pearl. You should have sold it and passed on the devil" (The Pearl, p.60).

However, Kino's brother does offer shelter to him despite his leprosy, and he tries to provide a diversion to facilitate their escape. For Kino, the pearl has become his misfortune and his life, his goal and his destruction. Hardness, cruelty and bitterness have replaced his former happy demeanor. Sadly, the darkness has conquered Kino. As he says, "The pearl has become my soul. If I give it up, I shall lose my soul" (The Pearl, p.62). This passage, of course, echoes the Bible, "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." (Matt.16:26) It appears as if monetary success will have brought on eternal damnation. At this point, Kino and the pearl are inseparable; the treasure has become so important that it has become part of Kino's very essence. Its ambiguity invades his inner being and transforms his lifestyle and surroundings, making him totally the opposite of what he originally was.



The final chapter begins with a setting as harsh as the initial setting is peaceful. As Levant says, "Kino travels into insanity and back again as he travels into the desert and back. He is fated, identifies with the pearl; that selfishness is insane; but always he retains some kindness and he is much puzzled by his nightmare." (30) Like Adam and Eve, Kino and Juana have been evicted from Eden into a hostile world, complete with an unfriendly wind and cold, uncaring stars in a black sky (The Pearl, p.63). The inequality of Kino and Juana is again emphasized as they begin their escape. Their former equal state has been superceded as sin enters their lives. Like Adam and Eve, they mistrust each other. Though previously their oneness has been stressed, Kino's capitulation to evil has separated them. Again Steinbeck calls attention to the primitive 'evil' urges of men, what John Calvin called "natural depravity." Like Jack in Golding's Lord of the Flies, Kino has regressed to an animal state and learned to find joy in death and destruction. As Steinbeck put it,

Some ancient thing stirred in Kino. Through his fear of dark and the devils that haunt the night there came a rush of exhilaration; some animal thing was moving in him so that he was cautious and wary and dangerous; some ancient thing out of the past of his people was alive in him (The Pearl, p.63).

Eerie sound imagery is also repeated here as an indication of

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(30)Levant, p.198.

Kino's dilemma. The evils of the night are about him in the coyotes' cries and the screeching and hissing of the owls. These predatory animals are stalking even as Kino is being stalked by evil and evil men.

However, Kino still obstinately refuses to see his plight, for "[the] music of the pearl was triumphant in Kino's head, and the quiet melody of the family underlay it, and they wove themselves into the soft padding of sandaled feet in the dust" (The Pearl, p.64). In fact, I feel that the opposing tunes here indicate the conflict Kino faces in deciding whether the pearl is a positive or negative force in his life. Eventually Kino chooses absolutes rather than ambiguity and persists in believing that all is well, that he and Juana will not be caught, since the power of the pearl is so overwhelming. Yet Juana again suggests that the value of the pearl is really an illusion. But although Kino can see the potential evil of footprints and trees that bleed, and the bad luck they might cause, he is blind to the potential danger that is still posed by the pearl. Though its evil glow burns in his eyes, he sees evil luck elsewhere than in his treasure, and ironically he finds his vision in its surface.

Surprisingly, however, this vision reveals to him how his own goals have been twisted and warped into evil. The intended good has been perverted.

He looked into his pearl to find his vision. "When we sell it at last, I will have a rifle," he said, and he looked into the shining surface for his rifle, but he saw

only a huddled dark body on the ground with shining blood dripping from its throat. And he said quickly, "We will be married in a great church." And in the pearl he saw Juana with her beaten face crawling home through the night. "Our son must learn to read," he said frantically. And there in the pearl Coyotito's face, thick and feverish from the medicine. (The Pearl, pp.65-66).

For a moment Kino senses the truth about the pearl, and just as suddenly the music changes. As Lester Marks points out,

instead of knowing freedom, Kino gains a knowledge of the acts of greed and brutality that men will commit in order to get the pearl for the wealth it will bring. The world, like the pearl that symbolizes it, is a shining deceit, and we find that Kino cannot keep the pearl without himself being corrupted. The courageous and trusting Kino experiences for the first time in his life the emotions of defensive fear and suspicion, and in his blindness he courts destruction of all he values most. His vain struggle to protect the pearl brings about the loss of his home, a spiritual estrangement from his wife, and the death of his son. (31)

However, Marks fails to note how difficult it is for Kino to accept the pearl's potential evil. The value system of society so perverts Kino's personal morals that he is unable to hold on to them. Instead Kino still persists in disregarding the omens that confront him. "And Kino thrust the pearl back into his clothing, and the music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears, and it was interwoven with the music of evil" (The Pearl, p.66). Shortly thereafter, Kino again behaves as an animal.

He listened, again, an animal light in his eyes. He stood up then silently; and, crouched low, he threaded his way through the brush toward the road. His body stiffened and he drew down his head and peeked out from under a fallen

branch. (The Pearl, p.67).

Eventually he recognizes that, like predatory animals, the three men he discovers on the road are tracking and hunting him. In a moment of helplessness and hopelessness, Kino considers surrender, but Juana helps him realize the futility of such an act. It would mean instant death for Kino and for his family. Animal instinct again prevails, and, losing the reasonable quality of man, Kino no longer covers his tracks, but sets out frantically in desperate flight. As Steinbeck says, "Kino ran for the high place as nearly all animals do when they are pursued" (The Pearl, p.69).

But unlike the biblical promise of finding help and consolation in the mountains, Kino discovers only Eliot's wasteland in his journey toward them - waterless desert, covered with cacti and sharp rocks. He has traveled from Eden/Paradise into Hell. This deathlike desolation suggests Kino's ultimate fate, a fate he comes to recognize as centered inside rather than outside of him.

Oh, the music of evil sang loud in Kino's head now, it sang with the whine and heat and with the dry ringing of snake rattles. It was not large and overwhelming now, but secret and poisonous, and the pounding of his heart gave it undertone and rhythm. (The Pearl, p.70)

The dissonant notes caused by the evil nature of the pearl are now so strong that even Juana and Kino's heritage of innocence and good cannot overcome them.

Eventually Kino sets his direction for a dark and shadowy cleft in the range. In simplistic Steinbeck imagery,

here is safety so often portrayed by the physical description of trees, caves, water, and valley. Yet, in Steinbeck's ambiguous moral world, even these symbols may experience reversal and become images of evil rather than good. Steinbeck shows this moral ambiguity in his description of the little spring of water where Kino and Juana stop. He enumerates the contradiction of the freshet in detail and then ends by saying, "The little pools were places of life because of the water, and places of killing because of the water, too" (The Pearl, p.73). Thus, despite their arrival at the pool of life, death is imminent. Like the pearl, the water also has two faces.

Similarly, when Kino discovers the cave, it seems to be a source of protection and safety but later the reader discovers it also foreshadows a tomb. At first Kino believes hiding will be a solution, but as time goes on, he realizes that more killing will be necessary. In short, the destruction of the trackers is essential to Kino's survival, and reluctantly Juana assents to his plan. Again in moral ambiguity, she relies on a weird combination of prayer and magic, "Hail Marys" and ancient intercession against black unhuman things (The Pearl, p.76).

Again the tone of the book indicates momentary optimism. The positive music, now almost a distant memory, once again returns briefly to drown out the negative.

And Kino's own music was in his head, the music of the

enemy, low and pulsing, nearly asleep. But the Song of the Family had become as fierce and sharp and feline as the snarl of a female puma. The family song was alive now and driving him down on the dark enemy (The Pearl, p.77).

yet Kino's animalistic actions are in direct contrast to the call of the music as he ruthlessly stalks his prey and prepares for the kill. The Song of the Family, previously peaceful and harmonic, has been transformed into a sharp, piercing battle cry.

Darkness is essential to his plan, and, as is true of most evil deeds, his first attempt is foiled by light, the light of the moon. His second try is marred by Coyotito's whimpering, but eventually he succeeds in killing all three of the trackers and seemingly wins a victory. However, the victory is shortlived when the reader discovers that the random shot fired by one of the trackers has been successful in hitting the top of Coyotito's head. The sacrifice of the first born son, a recurring Steinbeckian concern in Grapes of Wrath, To a God Unknown, and East of Eden, brings Kino to his senses even as it awakened Abraham, the Israelites in Egypt, and believers in Christ Jesus. The two, Juana and Kino, seem removed from the present due to their experience and transformed into archetypes. The narrator, by noting the reaction of the townspeople to the return of the couple, indicates the positive side of the experience. "The people say that the two seemed to be removed from human experience; that they had gone through pain and had come out on the other

side; that there was almost a magical protection about them" (The Pearl, p.80).

Kino now has a new and more accurate vision of the pearl.

He looked into its surface and it was gray and ulcerous. Evil faces peered from it into his eyes, and he saw the light of burning. And in the surface of the pearl he saw the frantic eyes of the man in the pool. And in the surface of the pearl he saw Coyotito lying in the little cave with the top of his head shot away. And the pearl was ugly; it was gray, like a malignant growth. And Kino heard the music of the pearl, distorted and insane (The Pearl, p.81).

With this knowledge the relationship of Juana and Kino is restored since now Kino and Juana both possess a complete awareness of the pearl's double nature. This change is indicated by the fact that when they return to La Paz, they walk not in single file but side by side, and when Kino throws the pearl into the water, they stand side by side for a long time.(32) I believe that this return to unity is a hint of catharsis and redemption, a return from the valley of the shadow of death. In fact, as the novel draws to a close, it appears as if Kino and Juana have returned full circle. Indeed, some critics have even seen the journey as a primitive tribal rite of initiation.(33) In any case, Juana and Kino find renewed unity even in the darkness. Steinbeck says, "The sun was behind them and their long shadows stalked ahead, and they seemed to carry two towers of darkness with them." (The

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(32) See Cox, p.117.

(33) Levant, p.203.

pearl, p.80). As the novel returns to its initial setting of mixed light and dark, Steinbeck indicates man's inescapable condition. In the final pages, Kino has matured, has accepted the duality of all things. As Harry Morris points out, Kino and Juana are doubles of Everyman, who in his journey discovers his true self-identity.

The full significance of Kino's throwing the pearl back into the sea now becomes clear: the act represents the willingness to accept a third journey, the journey still to be made, the journey that any fictional character has still to make after his dream-vision allegory is over. .... They must apply their new knowledge and win their way to eternal salvation, which can only come with their actual deaths. ... But his real triumph, his real gain, the heights to which he has risen rather than the depths to which he has slipped back is the immense knowledge that he has gained of good and evil. This knowledge is the tool that he needs to help him on the final journey, the inescapable journey that everyman must take. (34)

Now Kino's only thought is to be rid of the "evil" of the pearl. Consequently, when he returns to his people, simultaneously defeated and yet victorious, he tosses it into the sea. There, its ulcerous surface returns to the original green and lovely appearance. The ambiguity of its nature is retained even as it settles into the soft sand. Like Pearl in The Scarlet Letter, the Pearl of the World has turned out to be a pearl of great price, purchased by a sacrifice too large to be measured and at a cost impossible to count.

Steinbeck's version of the little tale has, according to

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(34) Harry Morris, "The Pearl: Realism and Allegory," in Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-five Years, ed. Tedlock and Wicker (Albuquerque, N.M., 1957), p.160.



Cox, led its victims from happiness and hope to desolation and despair "It begins with daybreak and ends with sunset, from the dark that precedes the light of day [to] the dark night of the soul."(35) Levant perceives the end similarly, praising Steinbeck's return to where he began. "Sunrise has become sunset. With all the passion spent, the family order renewed, and the ritual burial accomplished, Kino and Juana share a common, unspoken experience of evil; 'having gone through pain and come out on the other side,' they renounce the lure of 'the world' and can reenter their former Eden, forgiven."(36) Finally Morris asserts the importance of the parallelisms in the ending of the Steinbeck novella and the anonymous 14th century poem, Pearl, in which a father also mourns a dead child and attempts to cope with his loss. Morris notes that in the medieval poem's ending the father learns from the child the way to a new Jerusalem and as his struggle awakens him, he rises from the ground with new spiritual strength. In a similar manner, "Juana and Kino turn from the waterside with new spiritual strength, regenerated even as the father of the poem." (37) In addition Morris suggests that Steinbeck's chief themes in the novel "(cleaning of the soul, new wealth, complete well-being), may have come from the second stanza of the medieval poem" and that the renunciation of the wealth of

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(35)Cox, p.111.

(36)Levant, p. 204-205.

(37)Morris, p.161

the world in order to attain a higher spiritual goal is inherent in Steinbeck's text just as it was in the original.

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In each of these critical approaches, the authors recognize that desolation and despair are accompanied by stark realization of self and of the paradoxical world in which Juana and Kino live, complete with its moral ambiguity. But like the detractors of the novel, these defenders persist in seeing only the positive side of the story, ignoring the hellish defeat and agony of the protagonist. The Pearl is neither all positive nor all negative; it is a sensitive combination of both. Thus, despite French's contention that The Pearl is paste, such a negative reading is also not justified. Steinbeck does not, as French contends, leave the impression at the end of the novel that all is forgiven and will be forgotten.(39) Nor does Steinbeck illustrate his contention in the introduction to The Pearl: "As with all retold tales that are in people's hearts, there are only good and bad things and black and white things and no in-between anywhere." (The Pearl, p.1) Rather as Levant points out,

The ending offers an acceptance of things as they are. The extensive imagery of animal and tide-pool life may serve the function of preparing for this "primitive" moral quietness, this stoic withdrawal and acceptance. Yet the ending is human and just. ... Kino's manhood is more Edenic than worldly. He has striven unsuccessfully, at

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(38)Morris, p.161.

(39)French, p.142.

incalculable cost, to attain manhood in "the world," but he accepts literal and symbolic defeat on his own terms, as a rejection of the values of "the world" and a return to "Eden." (40)

I believe Levant here correctly identifies Kino's success/defeat. But Kino does not reject worldly desires in order to return to Eden. In fact, such a return is impossible. Like Hawthorne's protagonists who are initiated into evil, Kino has come through the experience with pain but is not unscarred by his encounter. A sadder but wiser Kino now faces his former existence with knowledge and intuition. He will never be the same.

Granted, Steinbeck does intentionally leave several loose ends untied. However, this is not a flaw, and Steinbeck's message is not that the simple life is best. Instead of solutions, Steinbeck leaves the reader with many dilemmas. Can Kino escape punishment? Can he be restored to his former place? Steinbeck purposely does not answer; for these answers, like the initial events of the tale, are veiled in the ambiguity that so fascinated Steinbeck. In fact, Steinbeck acknowledges the lack of absolutes in his introduction when he states "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it." (The Pearl, p.1) As Lawrence William Jones notes,

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(40)Levant, p.206.

While the finding of the pearl may [have been] a good thing in itself, the possibility of evil exists in man's tendency toward over-desire, for wanting something too much implies discontent with what one has. Still, the huge pearl at first seems a good omen, and in its surface Kino sees 'dream forms' of his principal desires. However, when he returns home, the essence of the pearl is mixed with the essence of men, and a curious dark residue was precipitated...Suffering has made Kino aware that his wilful separation from the community of men is evil, that it has been brought into his life by his own obsessive self-seeking pride, and that the fruit of his actions is the inevitable fruit of evil: death. Thus, he himself throws the "gray and ulcerous" pearl back into the sea. It seems to me that this well-made parable exemplifies all that is best in the fabulist's art. (41)

Like Hawthorne, Melville, and Mark Twain, Steinbeck as fabulist seeks in his work to delineate the moral values necessary for the regeneration of human society. By examining the existing society in parable form, a valuable distance is maintained which allows readers to see themselves without building a defensive wall. Therefore, it is more likely that an author's moral goals will be recognized and acted upon. I believe Steinbeck's goal in The Pearl is to help mankind break through, to understand the wholeness and all-encompassing nature of community. In addition, at the same time, he postulates a set of moral values which will make such a community thrive and he provides an indirect criticism of the existing society.

Ultimately, however, the reader must allow the fabulist some latitude, and those unwilling to do so will, of course,

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(41) Lawrence William Jones, John Steinbeck as Fabulist, ed. Marston LaFrance, (Muncie, Indiana, 1973), p.22.

not find The Pearl enjoyable or insightful. If his readers can allow Steinbeck's vision in this novel to have intellectual worth, it can excite and transform them and subdue and exorcise the emotions which could potentially destroy mankind. Though fabular characters are not supposed to be "real" people, I believe Steinbeck effectively uses their fictional example ironically in order to help us to see "real" truth. However, at times, the truth is difficult to accept, and the moral fabulist has to sugar the pill in order to get the patient to swallow it. I believe it is to Steinbeck's credit that he does not overly indulge in such sweetening in The Pearl. Rather, by combining minute detail with complex imagery, he creates a tale of archetypal significance. At times its mytho-poetic depth reaches the innermost part of man's being. Here man identifies with Kino and senses his kinship. Perhaps subconsciously he even reads between the lines and discovers in the wordlessness specific guidelines for his own ethos. Amazingly, such a discovery will be multiplied a hundred times over by what each reader brings to the fable, thus making The Pearl a novella of high intrinsic worth despite its relatively small size and the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of various critics.

## CHAPTER V

### EQUAL HOPE OR HAZARD:

#### THE SAD CURE OF EAST OF EDEN

The later writing of John Steinbeck reveals that he continued to revel in the apparent contradictions or paradoxes of life. At times he explored them to such an extreme that some critics found him to be confused and vague, especially when he combined and exposed apparent opposites as interrelated wholes and crafted them into symbols. But despite such objections, Steinbeck persisted in yoking two ideas without explanation, preferring to let the reader

discover the story quickly despite all of its innocent sound on these pages. Now the innocent sound and the slight concealment are not done as tricks but simply so that a man can take from this book as much as he can bring to it. It would not be wise to confuse an illiterate man with the statement of a rather profound philosophy. On the other hand, such a man might take pleasure in the surface story and even understand the other things in his unconscious. On the third hand - and I have three - your literate and understanding man will take the joy of discovering the secrets hidden in the book almost as though he searched for treasure, but we must never tell anyone they are here. Let them be found by accident.(1)

This passage taken from Steinbeck's Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters is quite explicit in formulating the purpose of Steinbeck's craft of synthesis or reconciling opposites. Such a craft allows the reader to probe either in a shallow manner or in depth, depending on his preference, his interests and his gifts.

By this point in his career such an approach had led to massive criticism as well as appreciation. As a result of his preoccupation with moral themes and his somewhat unusual way of expressing them, his reputation as an artist continued to fluctuate widely. Steinbeck was seen by some as a third rate writer of social tracts and by others as an inheritor of American literary tradition in the vein of Hawthorne and Melville. However, unfortunately there is still a general agreement even among his supporters that his later works do not measure up to his earlier accomplishments and that he was indeed one of those authors who seemed to have outlived his talent. Thus when Steinbeck claimed for his later novel, East of Eden, that he had been writing on this book

all my life. And throughout, you will find things that remind you of earlier work. That earlier work was practice for this, I am sure. And that is why I want this book to be good, because it is the first book. The rest was practice. I want it to be all forms, all methods, all approaches (Journal of a Novel ,pp.156-157)

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(1)John Steinbeck, Journal of a Novel (New York,1969), pp.19-20. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parentheses within the text of this paper.

and further claimed

the subject is the only one man has ever used as his theme -- the existence, the balance, the battle and the victory in the permanent war between wisdom and ignorance, light and darkness, good and evil.(2)

it was inevitable that critics would sit up and take notice. Some initial reactions to the publication were positive, others non-committal, but as time went on the general consensus about East of Eden was that it remained disappointing, containing moments of lyrical excellence but flawed by several weaknesses.

Many pointed out its structural problems. As Howard Levant states in The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study

East of Eden has every element that is characteristic of Steinbeck's impressive but flawed art. Consider the novel's combination of structural rigidity and narrative openness, its storytelling drive and its typed, or inert, or mouthpiece characters; its artificial structural devices and its essential looseness; its precisely accurate style and its embarrassingly inflated style; the explicit thematic design and the internal contradictions that betray that design; and its optimistic, moralizing message embodied in intellectual and structural manipulations so extreme they drain fictive credibility.(3)

Others found fault thematically. Critic Joseph Fontenrose states

The moral is imposed upon the story which is not a

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(2)John Steinbeck, East of Eden (New York,1952),book jacket. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parenthesis within the text of this paper.

(3)Howard Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study (Kansas City, Mo.,1974), pp.257-258.



recreated myth. A reader can enjoy East of Eden for its many fine passages of description and many pages of skillful narrative; but the myth invoked does not adequately interpret the narrated events.(4)

Critic Arthur Mizener was not even as kind as Levant and Fontenrose when he spoke of the defects in character which he observed in the novel.

There is evidence in East of Eden of what is quite clear from Steinbeck's earlier work, that so long as he sticks to animals and children and to situations he can see to some purpose from the point of view of his almost biological feeling for the continuity of life, he can release the considerable talent and sensitivity which are naturally his. As soon as he tries to see adult experience in the usual way and to find the familiar kind of moral in it, the insight and talent cease to work, and he writes like the author of any third-rate best seller.(5)

Even Peter Lisca, generally considered one of Steinbeck's most ardent supporters, expressed scepticism about Steinbeck's claims for his "masterpiece." Lisca considered East of Eden to be a shift in emphasis and was unable to agree with Steinbeck's contention that "If East of Eden isn't good, then I've been wasting my time. It has in it everything I have been able to learn about my art or craft or profession in all these years."(6) Rather Lisca saw very little in East of Eden that went back further than Burning Bright and felt that Steinbeck's "new direction.....had disastrous consequences for

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(4) Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1963), pp.126-127.

(5) Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick, N.J., 1958), p.275.

(6) John Steinbeck, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, (New York, 1975), p.431.

his art."(7)

Further evidence of the scepticism about East of Eden is evident in Tedlock and Wicker's Steinbeck and the Critics, which notes that aside from Joseph Wood Krutch and Mark Schorer, the praise in many other reviews "tended to be overwhelmingly qualified by what to the student of Steinbeck criticism have become its cliches." Tedlock also notes that "for somewhat more sophisticated reviewers the novel progressively betrayed improbabilities, sentimentality and intellectual naivete."(8)

More significantly the lavish praise of Schorer was later effectively cancelled out when according to Lisca

he refused to allow his review to be reprinted...saying that after re-reading the novel, he found his review totally mistaken in judgment and regretted its publication.(9)

Sadly very few critics rallied to Steinbeck's defense.

However, Lester Jay Marks, author of Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck is a passionate admirer of East of Eden. Marks believes that "Steinbeck has carefully welded theme to structure" and that "East of Eden is his most accomplished work of craftsmanship." And beyond that he states that "Steinbeck's creation is an act of love, a passionately moral declamation of his vision of the human condition."(10)

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(7)Lisca,p.275.

(8)E.W. Tedlock, Jr. and C.V. Wicker, eds., Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-five Years (Albuquerque,1957), p.xxxviii.

Defending Steinbeck against Lisca's criticism that the novel is a mere agglutination of materials, Marks tries to justify and explain both Steinbeck's structure and his theme. He concludes that in East of Eden "Steinbeck went far beyond affirming that man is great because he can survive the struggle (between good and evil). His vision for this novel is of man victorious over evil." (11)

John Clark Pratt in John Steinbeck: A Critical Essay, also defends Steinbeck's amazingly ambitious attempt and compares East of Eden to Melville's Moby Dick or to his later perplexing novel The Confidence Man. He further classifies it as "a late major work whose density has yet to be satisfactorily plumbed." (12) Pratt's Christian approach and his explanation of what he labels Steinbeck's syncretic Christian allegory and Raymond Griffith's analysis in "Dissonant Symphony: Multilevel Duality in the Works of John Steinbeck" are perhaps the closest readings by positive critics of East of Eden.

Aside from these two works, one of which is an unpublished dissertation, only Paul McCarthy's 1980 book about Steinbeck lavishes a great amount of praise on East of Eden. McCarthy specifically singles out Steinbeck's massive parable

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(9)Lisca, p.265.

(10)Lester Jay Marks, Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck (The Hague,1969), p.114.

(11)Marks, p.131.

(12)John Clark Pratt, John Steinbeck: A Critical Essay (Grand Rapids, Mich.,1970), pp.24-25.

of American life for praise, and he suggests that the novel, through the dreams and achievements of its characters, illustrates the inherent idealism and extravagance of early 19th century romances. He believes Steinbeck's choice of this approach is intentional and is quick to note that when the 20th century arrives in Part IV that the romantic expansiveness found in the earlier chapters of the work is now subordinated to the novelistic approach which marked the turn of the century. McCarthy also defends the novel structurally noting the thematic balance provided by the recollective and historical materials which open each part of the novel; moreover he suggests the relation of the Trask and Hamilton families is not as random as some readers have supposed. In Part I McCarthy contends that the two families are related through thematic contrasts and juxtaposition; in Part II by organic interrelationships of individual characters and in Parts III and IV by tangential interrelationships set up by heritage and remembrance. Finally McCarthy concludes

Although the novel's language lacks the vitality and richness found in the Grapes of Wrath, it is usually equal to the demands the author places on it. East of Eden, despite failures, not only deals with a wealth of diverse materials but does so primarily through the elusive and challenging form of romance.(13)

Despite these more recent positive evaluations, none of these four defenders of East of Eden go far enough in examining how

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(13)Paul McCarthy, John Steinbeck (New York, 1980), p.124.

Steinbeck's concept of moral ambiguity shaped the novel and continued the emphasis on this theme found in his earlier works.

Steinbeck's perception of the moral dilemma that confronted all men led him to explore what Jonathan Baumbach has labeled a major theme of modern American literature. Baumbach contends that

since 1945 the serious American novel has moved away from naturalism and the social scene to explore the underside of consciousness (the "heart of darkness") delineating in its various ways the burden and ambivalence of personal responsibility in a world that accomodates evil - that nightmare landscape we all inhabit.(14)

As perceptive as Baumbach's analysis is he does not seem to recognize that such a theme is not only modern but inherent in all American literature; in fact, it is a purely American dilemma. As has been stated earlier, the heritage of Puritanism and Calvinistic thought was brought to this continent by the early Pilgrim settlers who saw America as a potential new Jerusalem where the true faith could flourish and man could restore an Edenic paradise. But despite their determination, their idyllic plans were eventually thwarted by the pragmatic thinking of other early Americans who dismissed the Calvinistic doctrines of election and rigid adherence to God's will and stressed instead man's potential for progress and material gain. Several doctrines of Puritanism were even

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(14)Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York, 1965), p.3.

warped and shaped by these influential thinkers so that paradoxically it seemed as though religious thought supported and gave strength to materialistic tenets which were ironically counterproductive to faith in God and belief in a superior being. Thus, moral ambiguity, the dilemma of good vs. evil and their constant intermingling, was a part of American thought from the country's very beginning.

Steinbeck, of course, perceived this fact quite early in his life and, as has been noted in previous chapters, had certainly refined it before writing East of Eden. As he states in Journal of a Novel

I thought about the book a good deal yesterday - what it is about and what its title should be. Now its framework roots from that powerful, profound and perplexing story in Genesis of Cain and Abel. There is much of it I don't understand. Furthermore, it is very short, but this story with its implications has made a deeper mark in people than any other save possibly the story of the Tree of Life and Original Sin.....The punishment of Cain is a perplexing one. Out of Eve's sin came love and death. Cain invented murder and he is punished by life and protection. The mark put on him is not placed there to punish him but to protect him. Have you ever thought of that? (Journal of a Novel, p.120)

As the quote indicates, for Steinbeck it seemed incongruous that good could produce evil and that evil could grow out of good. For a while, at least, he also could not fathom that sin produced positive love and negative death and that the crime of murder could prompt forgiveness, life and protection.

However, as he studied the stories, especially the Cain and Abel narrative, he became more and more convinced of the fact that good and evil were inextricably mixed and that the

problem of moral ambiguity was a mirror to mankind's greatest problem. So convinced was Steinbeck of the duality of man's nature that in an initial stage he even considered the name Canable for his major characters instead of Trask, eventually rejecting it because it had a "double or rather triple meaning I didn't want." (Journal of a Novel, p.7)

Eventually Steinbeck began to feel that since the doctrine of original sin had been developed from the two earliest crimes, the tendency toward evil had been strengthened in all men. Once man accepted the mark and the taint of an imperfect sinful nature, he proceeded to acknowledge his inability to act on his own and confessed his guilt before he had even started his life in earnest. In Steinbeck's eyes, such an admission hindered man's potential accomplishments; in many cases man simply gave in, assumed from the start he was doomed to sin and punishment, and therefore accepted his fate as inevitable and unchanging. Steinbeck saw man as always satisfied to remain "East of Eden" and to move no further in an attempt to regain the promised land.

In the light of man's failure to subdue his evil nature, Steinbeck was able to claim in Journal of a Novel that without the Cain/Abel story

or rather a sense of it -- psychiatrists would have nothing to do. In other words this one story is the basis of all human neurosis -- and if you take the fall along with it, you have the total of the psychic troubles that can happen to a human.....And if this were just a

discussion of Biblical lore, I would throw it out but it is not. It is using the Biblical story as a measure of ourselves. (Journal of a Novel, p.139)

In Steinbeck's opinion, the basic flaw of man and the reason for his failure was the fact that he saw himself as God's puppet, tossed randomly about and not possessing a free will. Instead man believed his choice was limited to evil and that the sins of his father were visited on the children to the third and fourth generation; consequently he ceased to struggle against evil. If sin was inevitable anyway, what was the purpose of fighting it?

Primarily Steinbeck felt that the refusal of man to fight or struggle against his inherent depravity occurred because as an individual he did not possess an inner knowledge or realization of the moral ambiguity that surrounded him. If he had possessed this insight, man could not have failed to see, as Steinbeck had in East of Eden, that evil sometimes produced good, that good sometimes produced evil, and that men indeed had the ability to choose between the two.

But since man perceived all things as black or white rather than muted shades of grey, he did not utilize his ability to break out of the pattern of his forefathers and to stand strong in the confusing milieu of life, believing in his inner strength and his ability to overcome evil. Thus, instead of acknowledging the constant battle between good and evil that occurs in life, man eventually fell prey to his presuppositions and capitulated to evil, or, if this was not



the case, he chose the other extreme and mistakenly tried to deny evil's existence or to escape into a fantasy world where all is good.

Only two options seem open for mankind; either an idealistic perfection or an inhuman evil. I believe that Steinbeck's goal in East of Eden was to reveal that more than two options are open for mankind. Man need not select either of these as his model, for a third option, trying to walk the tightrope of the real world where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined, is also a possibility. Man fails to realize that his choice is not between the extremes of moral action but between an unreal world of perfect bliss and/or perfect evil and the real world where paradoxically both exist at the same time.

As Steinbeck says through Lee, Adam Trask's Chinese servant in East of Eden, the knowledge of a free will and the ability to make a choice between these two worlds is one of the most important questions that confront mankind (East of Eden, p.303). And as was stated earlier, Steinbeck had contemplated that fact long before the composition of East of Eden in 1952.

It is evident from an examination of Steinbeck's canon that in each successive work Steinbeck's concern about moral ambiguity became stronger and as a result Steinbeck's contention that each of his novels was merely an exercise preparing for East of Eden becomes more credible. As he

states:

But I want to write this book as though it were my last book. Maybe I believe that every book should be written that way. I think I mean that. It is the ideal. And I have done just the opposite. I have written each book as practice for the one to come. And this is the one to come. There is nothing beyond this book -- nothing follows it. It must contain all in the world I know and it must have everything in it of which I am capable -- all styles, all techniques, all poetry -- and it must have in it a great deal of laughter. (Journal of a Novel, p.8)

For Steinbeck, East of Eden became "the only book I have ever written for I think there is only one book to a man." (Journal of a Novel, p.3) Just previously in Journal of a Novel, he states in apparent contradiction that he believed that it was "two books -- the story of my country and me." (Journal of a Novel, p.2) However, using his syncretic method of combining opposites, the two become one and move the theme of moral ambiguity one step further. Essentially I believe that Steinbeck is saying that the dilemma of man will eventually become the dilemma of a whole society and that his native country, his America, was in many ways struggling because it too had failed to see how interrelated the opposites of good and evil are.

For those critics who doubt his purpose, Steinbeck clearly delineates his goal in Journal of a Novel.

I will tell them one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, story of all - the story of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of love and hate, of beauty and ugliness. I shall try to demonstrate to them how the doubles are inseparable -- how neither can exist without the other and how out of their groupings creativeness is born..... Perhaps this knowledge is saved for maturity, and very few people ever mature. It is enough if they

flower and reseed. That is all nature requires of them. But sometimes in a man or a woman awareness takes place -- not very often and always inexplicable. There are no words for it because there is no one ever to tell... In utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable. And sometimes if he is very fortunate and the time is right, a very little of what he is trying to do trickles through... A good writer always works at the impossible. (Journal of a Novel, pp.2-3)

Clearly Steinbeck's moral theme reflected his concern about his fellow men and their inability to take parables unless they are "fully clothed with flesh." His analysis of readers is that "any attempt to correlate in terms of thought is frightening." (Journal of a Novel, p.222) But despite his fear that "East of Eden was going to take a bad beating because it was full of such things," (Journal of a Novel, p.223) Steinbeck continued with his plan to create an epic work based on the moral ambiguity.

In the final analysis, I believe a close critical reading of East of Eden truly supports Steinbeck's feeling that the novel was a masterpiece that rivaled Grapes of Wrath, often considered his best work. Despite the fact that Steinbeck gives lavish attention to words and becomes too didactic in pounding his theme home to his public, I believe that the final result is a skillful construction that indeed combines all of the writing skills that Steinbeck had practiced so faithfully in years past. However, East of Eden also confirmed Steinbeck's fears that critics would misunderstand his work and would miss its intent no matter how skillfully it was arranged. As he stated in the original

draft for the dedication of the novel,

This book does not go from the writer to the reader. It goes first to the lion -- editors, publishers, critics, copy readers, sales department. It is kicked and slashed and gouged. And its bloodied father stands attorney. (Journal of a Novel, p.238)

Steinbeck felt critics would see the book as old-fashioned (Journal of a Novel, p.37), out of balance, containing extraneous material (Journal of a Novel, p.33), lasting too long (Journal of a Novel, pp.77,86-88), lacking chronology and good English grammar (Journal of a Novel, p.240) and creating inconsistent and unbelievable characters (Journal of a Novel, p.240). They would miss "the box of glory and end up with an armful of damp garbage." (Journal of a Novel, p.241) Indeed, such reactions were common. Despite frustration at such critics, Steinbeck still felt he could rely on his readers to redeem the accomplishment of East of Eden.

He's just like me, no stranger at all. He'll take from my book what he can bring to it. The dull witted will get dullness, and the brilliant may find things in my book I didn't know were there. (Journal of a Novel, p.241)

Yet at the same time Steinbeck was also fearful of the final reaction of the reading public. He recognized that by undertaking such a moral theme he was trying to explain the inexplicable and working at the impossible, and he was also fearful that his approach to his moral vision would be flawed. He wanted "a book so simple in its difficulty that a child could understand it" (Journal of a Novel, p.6), while yet "so full of casualness as to be quite disarming" (Journal of a

Novel, p.16). His goal was to stop his theme from being too obvious - "to make it so ordinary that it creeps in on you...to keep it at a low pitch and to let the reader furnish the emotion." Like Pilon in Tortilla Flat Steinbeck preferred a "good story which lay in half-told things which must be filled in out of the hearer's experience. It ruined a story to have it all come out quickly."(15)

Unfortunately, at times Steinbeck felt he had to reiterate the "half-told" things. Therefore the sensitive reader is bombarded with thematic emphasis. However, I believe that even this overindulgence can be somewhat excused in light of the complexity of Steinbeck's presentation. The depth of the story and symbols allows the reader to forgive the idiosyncrasies that Steinbeck inserts in his plot and character. There is a willing dispersion of disbelief that is motivated by skillful and complex story-telling technique and a definite sense of purpose in writing.

Obviously, Steinbeck felt that since East of Eden was really a kind of instruction on how to think about "life and the people around you" and because it included "little blades of social criticism without which no book is worth a fart in hell," (Journal of a Novel, p.52) it needed to move leisurely. Eventually this affected Steinbeck's structure since he believed that his reader needed to have time for reflection

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(15)John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat (New York,1973), p.33.

"to settle back and regard it quietly - to rest and think about it. Reflection is not a bad thing although I must say in this time it is not a popular pastime" (Journal of a Novel, pp.79-80).

Eventually in judging East of Eden, the reader must decide whether Steinbeck has been successful in avoiding the pitfalls he feared; creating believable simplicity in complexity, presenting moral truths without didacticism, using the structure of the novel to show rather than tell his reader and involving the reader in successful discovery of the great hidden thing, self-knowledge. A close reading of the work should provide evidence to support Steinbeck's success or failure.

Not surprisingly the theme of moral ambiguity begins in the first descriptive passages of the novel where Steinbeck pictures the two different impressions he receives from the mountain ranges in California. The Gabilan Range is "light, gay, full of sun, loneliness and warm foothills" while the Santa Lucia Range is "dark and brooding -- unfriendly and dangerous" (East of Eden, p.1). The symbols of light as goodness and darkness as evil are of course Biblical in nature. Even Calvin, in The Institutes, acknowledges that man is "himself but dust and ashes, the nearer he approaches to behold the glory of the Lord." Man is described by Calvin as rottenness and a worm and he reminds the reader that both Elijah and the cherubim were pale in comparison.(16) The next

paragraph also picks up the duality of nature with the Salinas River, which at times was "a little tranquil stream" but at other times "raged and boiled as a destroyer" (East of Eden, p.1). After this closeup of childhood memories, Steinbeck pans his camera through the whole state of California, and his reader is forewarned that the characters who will soon be presented are a microcosm of existence who stand for the whole nation.

Chapter two then shifts to the Hamiltons, Steinbeck's ancestors, as they settle the Salinas Valley. In typical Steinbeck technique this chapter is designed for later counterpoint with the main story of the Trasks, whom Steinbeck has yet to unveil. That this is Steinbeck's ultimate intention is revealed many times in Journal of a Novel as Steinbeck points out his search for balances. In addition, I believe the two families also are designed to illustrate the two options mankind has of dealing with his fallen nature. The Hamiltons are in constant struggle to overcome it while the pattern of the Trasks is to succumb to its demands. One need only to cite a few instances of Steinbeck's analysis of his techniques to see how he stresses the differences in the two families.

This Trask chapter is as dark and dour as a damp tunnel. It has to be. And the next Hamilton chapter is very light and gay. I'll have my contrasts all right. It will be

all contrasts and balances (Journal of a Novel, p.54).

I'm trying to implant a counterpoint of poetry just before the harsh prose that has to follow. I want always balances in the book - must have them (Journal of a Novel, p.43).

The Trask chapters will flow along in chronological story while the Hamilton chapters which play counterpoint are put together with millions of little pieces, matched and discarded. By this method I hope to get over a kind of veracity which would be impossible with straight-line narrative. But oh! Jesus am I going to catch critical hell for it. My carefully worked out method will be jumped on by the not too careful critic as slipshod. For it is not any easy form to come on quickly nor to understand immediately (Journal of a Novel, pp.39-40).

This device gives me the possibility of describing, interpolating, explaining without seeming to be a bore (Journal of a Novel, p.33).

As he proceeds to paint the simple unassuming life of Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck not only honors his grandfather but succeeds in portraying a common man, self-sufficient, inventive, friendly, easy to talk to, a confident and successful individual. I believe Steinbeck deliberately shows that Samuel's success is not typical in the "American" sense of the word since wealth eludes him. He is the poor immigrant from Ireland who owns the unproductive land, and he is designed to be in direct contrast with Adam Trask whose background is heritage, money and good land.

To understand this new breed who arrived in California and settled the Valley along with his grandfather, Steinbeck flashes back to the 1860's and for the remainder of Book I he tells the story of Adam Trask, his brother Charles and their parents, Cyrus Trask, his unnamed first wife, and his second



wife, Alice Trask. Symbolically, Steinbeck has also introduced his first Cain and Abel symbols which have been established as the root of his tale.

Cyrus Trask and his first wife are opposites, just as Cain and Abel are usually thought to be. Cyrus is described as "something of a devil" (East of Eden, p.14), while Mrs. Trask is "a pale, inside-herself woman, intensely religious" who eventually commits suicide as a way "of fulfilling the wishes of her God" (East of Eden, p.15). This Puritan portrait illustrates the dilemma of man's fallen nature and of those to whom divine election is not obvious. Thus Mrs. Trask, in Calvin's words, "labors under the disease (sin) but is unfortunately not one of those who recover health from the Lord's healing hand."(17) Before her untimely death, however, she presents Cyrus with a son, Adam, and Cyrus begins to function in a dual role under Steinbeck's syncretic symbolism. He is both a C/Cain symbol and a Zeus/father God symbol as his amalgamatic name suggests.(18)

With Cyrus' second marriage to Alice Trask the C/A symbolism begins to blossom in earnest. It will eventually mushroom to even greater size. The second Mrs. Trask is quiet and unassuming like Abel, and she produces a half-brother for Adam who is promptly christened Charles. Meanwhile Cyrus is increasingly pictured as Cain, desirous and

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(17)Calvin, Vol. I, ch. V, p.275.

(18)Pratt, p.28.

needing recognition and affection. Moreover, his harsh actions and expectations begin the tubercular illness of Alice/Abel who will eventually die from his strict rule.

The boys, also C/A symbols, are like their parents, seemingly direct opposites. Adam is obedient, shrinks from violence and tension, while Charles is assertive, strong, skillful and smart. Their competition, however, is still quite strong and is for the most part based on accomplishments. Other rivalries revolve around the love of Alice and the recognition of Cyrus Trask. As Samuel Hamilton will explain later in the novel,

The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for rejection, and with the crime guilt -- and there is the story of mankind (East of Eden, p.270).

Obviously Steinbeck intends this premise of existence to relate to moral ambiguity and the unpredictable quality of good and evil. This moral ambiguity is evident when Adam tries to please Alice, to win her love by placing little gifts in conspicuous places. However, Alice mistakenly believes that it is Charles who is giving her the presents and praises him rather than her step-son. Conversely, when Charles presents Cyrus with an expensive knife made in Germany as an expression of his love, Cyrus is more impressed by Adam's gift of a mongrel pup. Certainly Steinbeck shows the human tendency to be drawn toward the opposite of one's own

character as well as the fact that good intentions do not always draw positive responses from others.

In each situation the anger wells up in the individual who is rejected, and by such actions, especially on Adam's part, Steinbeck already suggests that there is a bit of Cain in Abel. In the latter situation, however, the Biblical story is retold exactly. Charles/Cain in his fury at his father's refusal of his gift tries to kill Adam/Abel, first by beating him with a baseball bat and later by searching for him with a hatchet.

Although this parallel is obvious, Steinbeck subtly combines it with other less similar events to show moral ambiguity. Ironically he creates Adam's relationship with his father so that it also has echoes of a Cain problem, rather than a loving Abel relationship. In this case, Adam feels that Cyrus expects too much of him, especially when he begins to speak of a military career which Adam despises. This mixing of symbols suggests Steinbeck's belief that evil is intermixed with good and that Adams and Abels may be unfairly tested by their fathers just as Charles/Cains are.

Still another reversal is the intense love of Charles/Cain for Cyrus, a devoted quality that is often associated with Abel in the original story but which evidences that Steinbeck felt there was good in evil as well as evil in good. In a final reversal of the Biblical tale, Steinbeck has the good Adam/Abel character exiled from home while

Charles/Cain is left on the land, again reinforcing moral ambiguity of man's punishment for sin. After Adam is sent away the relationship of the brothers changes. Steinbeck says that during their exchange of letters, each knew his brother better than ever before or afterward. In fact, one of Charles' letters to Adam is cited by Steinbeck in the Journal as a key factor in interpreting the novel. As he writes to Covici:

The letter written by Charles to Adam is a very tricky one, and it has in it, concealed but certainly there, a number of keys. I recommend that you read it very carefully -- very carefully because if you miss this you will miss a great deal of the book and maybe will not pick it up until much later (Journal of a Novel, p.35).

The key lines in the letter reveal Charles' inability to understand his rejection by his father and his essential realization that his father's reaction to the situation - banishing Adam - has not been fair. In his guilt for his action, he looks for some adequate punishment, unable to accept the fact that the line between good and evil will always be hazy and indiscriminate. The lines read:

I want to say -- I want to say -- I mean, I never understood - well, why our father did it. I mean why didn't he like that knife I bought for him on his birthday. Why didn't he? It was a good knife and he needed a good knife. If he had used it or even honed it, or took it out of his pocket and looked at it -- that's all he had to do. If he'd liked it I wouldn't have took out after you. Seems to me there's something not finished. Seems like when you half finished a job and can't think what it was. Something didn't get done. I shouldn't be here. I ought to be wandering around the world instead of sitting here on a good farm looking for a wife.....It's me should be where you are and you here (East of Eden, p.37).

Charles rejects the assumption that good can come to evil, and he almost fatalistically craves his Cain role and its punishment rather than recognizing that he can freely accept the opposite role in life, since good and evil constantly intermingle. By failing to see his Abel traits, he allows his life to stagnate, and he remains isolated on the farm -- not realizing the pattern can be broken by his own choice. As John Clark Pratt notes

Those characters who accept their Biblical heritage without comprehending its complexity are doomed. Even those who do recognize the significance of their names come to grief as long as they persist in narrowing in on one source alone.(19)

Charles' deep identification with Cain is contrasted in the following Hamilton chapter where most of the brood of Samuel Hamilton are associated with the goodness of Abel. George is described as "polite and what they used to call no trouble. He was a sinless boy and grew to be a sinless man. No crime of commission was ever attributed to him, and his crimes of omission were only misdemeanors" (East of Eden, p.38) Will Hamilton is also seen as an Abel when the author states that he "liked to live so that no one could find fault with him and to do that he had to live as nearly like other people as possible" (East of Eden, p.38) Similarly Tom is pictured as living "in a world shining and fresh and as uninspected as Eden on the sixth day" (East of Eden, p.40).

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(19)John Clark Pratt, John Steinbeck: A Critical Essay, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), p.29.

Here Steinbeck seems almost carried away with the beauty of language. It seems as though his fascination with sound and symbol transports him in to using expressions which at times seem too pat and too contrived. The disappointment of being misunderstood and misinterpreted by critics had taken its toll on Steinbeck. At this point in his career, I believe he felt that overindulgence in any area of his writing was justified, so long as the thematic emphasis which he found so important was finally communicated.

As the novel continues, it is evident that once again the duality of life, the intertwining of good and evil is present. The goodness of the Hamiltons does not seem to pay off. Samuel gets no richer, and many of his sons are considered inept. However, although the genetic inheritance of the Hamiltons and the imprint of Samuel and Liza on their children is just as great as the influence of Cyrus Trask, they too are unable to transmit a world that is only white and black.

Chapter Six finds Charles further accepting his Cain image and even being marked with a scar to show his stigma. As he says

It looks like somebody marked me like a cow. The damn thing looks darker. By the time you get home it will maybe be black....I don't know why it bothers me,...It just seems like I was marked. And when I go into town, like to the inn, why people are always looking at it. I can hear them talking about it when they don't know I can hear. (East of Eden, p.47)

This chapter also examines Cyrus, who although still evil in

his lies about his Civil War background, is still prospering in Washington (East of Eden, p.51). He now has great influence in high places despite his lack of any real expertise in military affairs. Once again Steinbeck is stressing moral ambiguity since one Cain figure is marked for no offense or one that has been forgiven, while the other experiences material and worldly success despite the more serious nature of his crimes. Spiritually, Charles is cut off from his father, as Calvin puts it, "as the reprobate have no rooted conviction of the paternal love of God, so they do not in return yield the love of sons but are led by a kind of mercenary affection."(20)

Chapter seven shifts to the Abel figure, Adam, who ironically becomes a true brother to wandering tramps after leaving the army. No longer the hard worker of the original Biblical story, he is punished for the "crime" of vagrancy. Once again the innocent is exposed to evil. He learns "how men can consider other men as beasts and that the easiest way to get along with such men was to be a beast. A clean face, an open face, an eye raised to meet an eye - these drew attention and attention brought punishment" (East of Eden, p.57). Then in true moral ambiguity the good Adam/Abel steals from a Georgia store, justifying his theft by the fact that he has taken nothing which is not heavily stocked and that he

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(20)Calvin, Vol. I, ch. II, p.480.

intends to return it or pay for it eventually.

The brothers are reunited in this chapter after Cyrus' death, but they only realize their differences rather than the similarities which they also share. The Cain figure Charles admits how much his father meant to him while Abel/Adam confesses "most of the time I hated him" (East of Eden, p.64). Similarly, only Charles suspects that the inheritance of Cyrus has questionable origins because he knows that the descendants of Cain trick, lie, cheat, and steal, and he counts his father among them. On the other hand, Adam/Abel, in typical naivete, denies the possibility that his father's money may be soiled - unwilling to admit that he shares a Cain background with his progenitor. Adam proceeds to voice Steinbeck's recognition that

maybe love makes you suspicious and doubting. I can see it pretty clearly. I can see how you loved him and what it did to you. I did not love him. Maybe he loved me. He tested me and hurt me and punished me and finally sent me out like a sacrifice, maybe to make up for something. But he did not love you, and so he had faith in you. Maybe -- why, maybe, it's a kind of reverse (East of Eden, p.70).

For one short moment Adam receives an important self-insight. Guilt and shame are no longer a part of him, and he can rely on faith rather than fate to guide his actions (East of Eden, p.71). But he prefigures the fact that this will not always be the case when he says to Charles, "Maybe sometime I'll get what you have, but I haven't got it now" (East of Eden, p.70).

Chapter eight introduces Cathy Ames, who like other Cain



figures, is delineated as evil, a monster, perhaps even possessed by the devil. Despite her birth from an "A" family, she has acknowledged none of her Ames/Abel heritage, preferring sin and the manipulation of others, particularly through sex. Early in her life, through seduction, she causes the death of her Latin teacher, James Grew, a pale Abel who had "failed" in divinity school. Grew, overcome with guilt, kills himself in the church, a fate which he considers proper retribution for his crime. However, Cathy/Cain is not her brother's keeper and can only smile at his suicide while she proceeds to arrange the deaths of her overly suspicious parents. Successful in eliminating their threat to the discovery of her evil by burning their house, Cathy also fakes her own kidnapping and suggests her possible murder. No one suspects her of the crime since in typical moral ambiguity she has always projected a pretty and loving outward appearance which makes her too sweet to have committed such an act. In her new identity as Catherine Amesbury, Cathy also utilizes the well known fact that outward appearances are deceiving to entrap Mr. Edwards, the whoremaster for whom she goes to work. But as is often the case, evil sees through evil, and eventually Edwards recognizes her duplicity and nearly beats her to death.

At this point, Steinbeck cleverly joins two of the three plot lines which he has established by having Cathy arrive at the Trask farmhouse after the beating. As a result of

Edwards' blows, she too has her forehead laid open to the skull and it becomes her Cain sign. In fact, for a time Steinbeck even considered "Cain Sign" as the title of his work. Charles immediately distrusts her, saying "There's something I almost recognize!" (East of Eden, p.116) as he realizes they are basically the same type. "And if he had recognized her, so had she recognized him. He was the only person who had ever played it her way" (East of Eden, p.118). However, the two Cain figures are repelled rather than attracted to each other, and it is Adam who nurses Cathy back to health and in typical intertwining of evil and good, marries her. But with Cathy's seduction of Charles on her wedding night to Adam, Steinbeck ends Part I suggesting that wedded bliss is not to be for these yoked opposites.

Part II moves to a new decade, a new century and a new chapter of a new life as Adam prepares to move to California, his new Eden. But even as Steinbeck recognizes the potential of renewal, he also sees the loss of the past, or a feeling that it can be left behind.

To hell with that rotten century! Let's get it over and the doors closed shut on it! Let's close it like a book and go on reading! New chapter, new life. A man will have clean hands once we get the lid slammed on that stinking century. It's a fair thing ahead. There's no rot on this clean new hundred years. It's not stacked and any bastard who deals seconds from this new deck of year - why we'll crucify him head down over a privy (East of Eden, p.130).

Here Steinbeck returns to the technique he utilized so well in the interchapters of The Grapes of Wrath. The narrative voice

pulls the camera back to wide focus, to see how specific events in the lives of specific characters were mirrored in society as a whole. It was an innovation in writing that he adapted from Dos Passos and which intrigued him as yet another way to present parallels and paradoxes.

In Steinbeck's mind the past could not be ignored or seen as a closed door. It must rather be accepted with confidence and overcome if the highest human potential is to be reached. Mirroring the tension of the turn of the century, Steinbeck proceeds to examine just what human potential involves and how the times will affect it. As he generalizes the experience of the families to the larger perspective of all mankind, Steinbeck decides that

the free exploring mind of the individual is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion or government which limits or destroys the individual.....the free mind, for that is the one thing which can by inspection destroy such a system. (and) I will fight against it to preserve the one thing that separates us from the noncreative beasts. If the glory can be killed we are lost (East of Eden, p.132).

Yet, despite the narrator's commitment, when Steinbeck returns to his narrative, such freedom and glory is certainly not seen in Adam's close-minded approach to the nature and desires of his new wife. Instead he fails to understand Cathy, seeing only glory rather than the dark side of her. "Burned in his mind was the image of beauty and tenderness, a sweet and holy girl, precious beyond thinking, clean and

loving," (East of Eden, p.133) and nothing she said or did could warp that image.

Upon their arrival in California the Trasks are introduced to the Hamiltons in Section 3 of Chapter 13 and the interrelationship of the three original plot lines is finally established. Adam seeks out Samuel's advice in order to find water on his newly acquired land but symbolically he is searching for renewal and for insight from a prophet. At this point, however, Adam is unaware of the fact that Samuel has more to offer than just physical talent. Samuel has insight into the human soul and the interrelationship of good and evil. He says

This will be a valley of great richness one day. It could feed the world and maybe it will. [Yet] there's a blackness on this valley... Sometimes on a white blinding day I can feel it cutting off the sun and squeezing the light out of it like a sponge...It's as though some old ghost haunted it out of the dead and troubled the air with unhappiness. It's as secret as a hidden sorrow (East of Eden, p.146).

The next chapter, which contains Steinbeck's digression about his mother, Olive Hamilton, Samuel's daughter, is certainly a part of East of Eden, although many critics felt it was not only unnecessary, but totally unrelated to his novel. Not only had Steinbeck left the Trasks in mid-story but he had jumped many years in time as well. However, seen through the theme of moral ambiguity, there are several relevant facts. First, Olive is a teacher, and she is devoted to knowledge, not only of facts, but of one's self and the

many potentials which humanity could develop. Secondly, in this one short episode, Olive is revealed as having the necessary balance required to succeed in life. First of all, her method of dealing with the author's serious illness shows that she recognizes the fact that both good and evil have power in the world. She asks for the prayers of an Episcopalian, a Catholic and a Christian Scientist while also using incantation, magic and herbal formulas.

Section 2, which deals with Olive's involvement in the war effort, is even less obviously involved with the plot, but it also serves to remind us that it is possible to change one's attitudes and life style. Man need not be locked into Cain and Abel roles. The first evidence of this is Olive's success at selling Liberty bonds when she had never sold anything in her life but angel cake. Her ride in the airplane also evidences her determination to try a new thing, and it stresses how ambiguity can change one's life. This ambiguity is, of course, related to Olive's misinterpretation of the word "stunt" which she heard as "stuck." Her smiling and nodding results in a truly wild airplane ride when Olive probably would have preferred none at all. Without this thematic key of moral ambiguity and the knowledge of Steinbeck's interest in counterpoint, however, this episode surely seems a flaw to a reader who was only interested in the Trask plot line. However, it is surely related to Steinbeck's concept for the whole work.

After this brief time for reflection and parallelism, Chapter 15 introduces Lee, a Chinese who eventually becomes the Trask's household servant. In his Journal, Steinbeck identifies him as a mouthpiece.

Now you are going to like Lee. He is a philosopher. And also he is a kind and thoughtful man. And beyond all this he is going into the book because I need him. The book needs his eye and his criticism which is more detached than mine (Journal of a Novel, p.97).

It is obvious from Lee's talk with Samuel that he is indeed one of those people who has an insight into the world and sees its essential duality. He finds a comradeship with Samuel who also possesses this trait. With Samuel, Lee does not need to conceal his education beneath Pidgin English; rather he can be his true self. As he says to Samuel

You are one of the rare people who can separate your observation from your preconception. You see what is, where most people see what they expect (East of Eden, p.163).

This trait established Steinbeck's grandfather as one who did not succumb to expected norms or prejudgments and who accepted the fact that the morality and immorality of man is often a hazy question.

As Samuel and Adam proceed to look for water, their discussion deals with the land. Adam, of course, sees only the extremes and points out the vast differences between Connecticut, where stones abound, and California, where there are no stones to inhibit plowing. Obviously he symbolically suggests that the Salinas Valley is closer to Eden. However,

Samuel is not so naive. He recognizes there are stones even in California, and he compares them to sins of man. God, as Calvin notes in The Institutes, "dispenses good and evil with perfect regularity,"(21) and it is often difficult for man "to turn away from his own works and look only to the mercy of God and the perfection of Christ."(22) As Samuel states,

If a man had to shuck off everything he had, inside and out, he'd manage to hide a few little sins somewhere for his own discomfort. They're the last things we'll give up. [They] keep us humble..... [but] it's hard to see where its value rests unless you grant that it is pleasurable pain and very precious (East of Eden, p.168).

The conversation then leads to Cathy, whom Adam still persists in seeing as an Abel, as he sees himself, rather than part Cain. This occurs when Adam identifies himself with his earliest namesake and says, "So far I've had no Eden let alone been driven out." Samuel picks up the conversation by suggesting an apple orchard for Adam's Eve, Cathy. But Adam refuses to plant apples and insists that his Eve will celebrate his choice. "I don't think anyone can know her goodness." As a result of this conversation, Samuel recognizes that Adam is only seeing one side of life and contemplates bursting his bubble. He says satirically,

It's my duty to take this thing of yours and kick it in the face, then raise it up and spread slime on it thick enough to blot out its dangerous light."

.....I should hold it up to you muck-covered and show you its dirt and danger. I should warn you to look closer

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(21)Calvin, Vol. II, ch. VII, p.15.

(22)Calvin, Vol. II, ch. XI, p.57.

until you can see how ugly it really is. I should ask you to think of inconstancy and give you examples. I should give you Othello's handkerchief. Oh, I know I should. And I should straighten out your tangled thoughts, show you that the impulse is gray as lead and rotten as a dead cow in wet weather. If I did my duty well, I could give you back your bad old life and feel good about it, and welcome you back to the musty membership of the lodge (East of Eden, p.171).

As he leaves the ranch, Samuel feels world sadness at what he has seen for he recognizes that evil has triumphed in Cathy rather than good. Instead of recognizing the dual heritage of good and evil in all men, she has chosen only one, and her husband has chosen its opposite.

The finding of the meteorite in Chapter 17 by the drillers not only refutes Adam's belief that there are no stones in California, but also shows through the setting how evil can be in the center of good. Steinbeck's symbolic intention for this physical discovery is evident when he parallels the situation and reverses it in the birth of Cathy's twins. Perhaps here in the center of evil will be good. Certainly at this point in her life Cathy is surrounded by good, but she still acts as a ravenous animal and bites Samuel when he tries to help her with the delivery. In Pratt's syncretic symbolism, I believe that at that moment she would be classified as both Eve and the snake.(23) Though the reader may not understand such inhumanity in humanity, he does recognize that it exists. As Steinbeck says in Journal of a

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(23)See Pratt, p.28.



Novel, "She (Cathy) is a little piece of the monster that is in all of us" (Journal of A Novel, p.129).

He contends that, furthermore, this tendency exists in all humanity, not only in Cathy. As he says in the second section of Chapter 13:

Maybe we all have in us a secret pond where evil and ugly things germinate and grow strong. But this culture is fenced, and the swimming brood climbs up only to fall back. Might it not be that in the dark pools of some men the evil grows strong enough to wriggle over the fence and swim free? Would not such a man be our monster, and are we not related to him in our hidden water? It would be absurd if we did not understand both angels and devils, since we invented them (East of Eden, pp.132-133).

Here Steinbeck presents a difficult dilemma for critics since the intrinsic evil of Cathy has for some negated Steinbeck's expression of free will later in the novel. It is as though Steinbeck postulates a theory but then refuses to let it apply universally to all his characters. Cathy is at once the compliment and the contradiction of man's present state. She is simultaneously fallen and hopeless, yet she has buried within her the possibility to be newborn and hopeful if only she will be open to it. Using her dual nature, Steinbeck reenacts the Cain and Abel story yet another time, as shortly after the birth of the twins, Cathy shoots Adam and escapes from her marriage and her children. Once again the Abel figure is nearly destroyed by the evil that lurks inside man. Yet it is significant that the reason Cathy leaves is that her Cain/evil is also threatened by Adam's and Lee's good. Adam, in typical naivete, refuses to accept what has happened, since

his fantasy world of a good Cathy has exploded. Evil has somehow managed to invade his inviolable good. As a result, he terminates all his plans for Eden and zombie-like proceeds to ignore his offspring and to treat them as if they didn't exist.

As Chapter 19 begins, Steinbeck once more generalizes and reminds the reader that the Hamiltons and the Trasks are but a microcosm of all existence. Here he restates moral ambiguity in minor characters and in institutions. For example, the Rev. Billing,

when they caught up with him, turned out to be a thief, an adulterer, a libertine, and a zoophilist, but that didn't change the fact that he had communicated some good things to a great number of receptive people. Billing went to jail, but no one ever arrested the good things he had released. And it doesn't matter much that his motive was impure. He used good material and some of it stuck (East of Eden, p.218).

Similarly, Steinbeck contends again that the polar opposites, the church and the whorehouse, essentially produce the same things.

The church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously. And each would have been horrified to think it was a different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels (East of Eden, p.217).

Again after a digression, the story resumes, and Cathy, who has now become Kate, has settled in at one of the whorehouses mentioned in the previous chapter. She has also begun to worm her way into the confidences of Faye, the madame of this

house. Again through her outwardly loving and caring manner, which covers the evil inside her, Kate begins to take over the house, and Faye makes the mistake of promising to will Kate the enterprise after she dies.

Eventually the outward facade of Kate is discovered when, under the influence of drink, she declares her intentions of transforming the house into a sado-masochistic brothel when she inherits it. As a result, Kate is forced to step up her plan to do away with Faye, thus reaffirming her Cain status as a ruthless murderer. Soon the plot on Faye's life is successful, and, due to the moral ambiguity where no one questions evil which occurs within evil (the whorehouse), again no one suspects Kate.

At this point, Steinbeck is forced to counterpoint Kate's evil with good. He returns to the Hamiltons and to Adam Trask's twin sons, as Samuel tries to help Adam by forcing him to accept life again and name his sons. Adam expresses fear of his bad blood and fear that his children have inherited only the evil of their mother and not his own positive tendencies. Obviously he has programmed his life, as Steinbeck did in his early years, to believe the evil always conquers good. But Samuel reaffirms his belief in the ambiguous nature of inheritance.

"I don't very much believe in blood," said Samuel. "I think when a man finds good or bad in his children he is seeing only what he planted in them after they cleared the womb" (East of Eden, p.262).

On page 264 he reiterates that this is his own problem as well. He, like the twins, did not inherit the qualities of his name but the universal qualities of man, a mixture of good and evil. In fact, considering the other symbolic letters of names, he may be Steinbeck's example of Seth, the third child of Adam and Eve, who is unlike either of his brothers.(24)

"It would be a mistake to name them for qualities we think they have," Samuel said. "We might be wrong -- so wrong. Maybe it would be good to give them a high mark to shoot at -- a name to live up to. The man I'm named for had his name called clear by the Lord God, and I've been listening all my life. And once or twice I've thought I heard my name called -- but not clear, not clear" (East of Eden, p.264).

Thus Samuel blames only himself for his inaction, his failure to assert his positive urges over the negative ones.

"It's because I haven't courage," said Samuel. "I could never quite take the responsibility. When the Lord God did not call my name, I might have called His name -- but I did not. There you have the difference between greatness and mediocrity" (East of Eden, p.264).

Like his Biblical namesake, Steinbeck's grandfather acknowledges that he awaited God's call to election, not initiating any action on his own.

The novel reemphasizes the importance of identity as "given" names are discussed for Adam's children. The naming of the twins leads to Steinbeck's strongest statement of his moral theme as Lee, Adam and Samuel discuss Cain and Abel as possible names for the children. The conversation leads each

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(24)Pratt, p.30.

man to speculate on the great guilt that surrounds all man. They discuss different approaches to guilt and how Adam has taken it on himself. Lee emphasizes that man is somehow happy with it.

Lee said, "So [am] I, so [is] everyone. We gather our arms full of guilt as though it were precious stuff. It must be that we want it that way" (East of Eden, p.268).

Adam then analyzes man's attitude as grateful for the Cain/Abel guilt because it gives him an excuse to fail. As Calvin says, "While in the flesh, we can never give God the love which we owe him. Thus the Law is a kind of mirror in which man beholds his impotence, his inequity, and finally the curse as a consequence of both."(25) It makes the story better.

"Because," Adam said excitedly, "we are descended from this. This is our father. Some of our guilt is absorbed in our ancestry. What chance did we have? We are the children of our father. It means we aren't the first. It's an excuse, and there aren't enough excuses in the world" (East of Eden, p.269).

Then quite suddenly the three men discover the strange paradox in the story -- the fact that Cain's rejection is seemingly unmotivated and that the mark he receives after the murder was a preserving mark. In addition, Cain seems to have been further rewarded for his crime since he lived and has children while Abel died without them. Lee finally expresses the story's central theme and Steinbeck's contention of how

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(25)Calvin, Vol. I, ch. VII, p.305.

the Cain and Abel story has affected society.

It is all there -- the start, the beginning. One child, refused the love he craves, kicks the cat and hides his secret guilt; and another steals so that money will make him loved; and a third conquers the world -- and always the guilt and revenge and more guilt. The human is the only guilty animal. Now wait! Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul -- the secret, rejected, guilty soul. Mr. Trask, you said you did not kill your brother and then you remembered something. I don't want to know what it was, but was it very far apart from Cain and Abel? (East of Eden, pp.270-271)

As Part II ends, the twins are christened Caleb and Aaron but with the C/A symbolism the cycle of Cain and Abel begins yet another time. But I believe the aside for the symbolism in the combination of the given names reiterates the ambiguity and the "syncretic" symbolism of Pratt. The names, of course, echo other Biblical characters. Caleb is a figure in the Old Testament who reaches the promised land while Aaron is an Old Testament prophet who, while originally on the right track, later follows false gods and makes idols. Such images are of course the reverse of Cain/Abel expectations and evidence of the moral ambiguity caused by the intermingling of good and evil.

Part II of the novel begins with the death of Una Hamilton, Samuel's daughter, and is once again a portion of the novel which has been denounced by critics as extraneous and unrelated material. However, in Steinbeck's schema of moral ambiguity it is another essential, for in Una's death we have an example of Samuel Hamilton's analysis of his failures.

Here Samuel becomes the guilty Cain figure, emphasizing the other side of his dual character. He blames himself for Una's death, feeling that it was his neglect that had caused it (East of Eden, p.276), and he also holds himself responsible for his son, Tom, the only one of his children who is brooding and maladjusted. Although feeling the guilt of Cain, Samuel reverses the original story, for although he feels guilt and desires punishment, he is also a father figure and deems himself his brother's keeper.

Samuel's son Tom is also shown to be following his father's dual tendencies, fluctuating back and forth as a Cain or an Abel. "He was arguing with greatness. And the father watched his son and could feel the drive and the fear, the advance and the retreat, because he could feel it himself" (East of Eden, p.277). Instead of embracing life, Tom always seems to be rejecting it. In all probability, Tom's relationship to Samuel paralleled Steinbeck's own relationship with his son Thom, a relationship which he mentions rather often in Journal of a Novel. In his frustrating early teenage years, when East of Eden was written, Thom Steinbeck also seemed to be undergoing the fear of rejection and the need for acceptance which is the heart of the novel (East of Eden, pp. 13,32,147). As the son of a great man, no doubt he often felt inadequate like Tom Hamilton, perhaps even to the point that this line about Samuel and Tom also applied to him.

"It is probable that his father stood between Tom and the

sun and that Samuel's shadow fell on him" (East of Eden, p.282).

Tom's relationship to his Father/God was one of awe and respect, and on many occasions he felt unable to live up to his expectations and accomplishments. Given such a personal share in his message, it is no wonder that Steinbeck literally echoes the moral theme in every syllable of East of Eden.

After this episode the Hamiltons begin to recognize Samuel's increasing old age and try to help him by caring for his needs as he grows older. Always the wise man who understands his position and his role in life, Samuel sees through the facade of his children's concern and knows he hasn't got long to live or to influence and teach others. His efforts to help the Trasks must be accelerated.

Returning to the Trask plot, Steinbeck balances Cal and Aron's disparity with Samuel's confusing mixture of personality. As Lee says

And they're very different. You can't imagine how different."

"In what way, Lee?"

"You'll see when they come home from school. They're like two sides of a medal. Cal is sharp and dark and watchful, and his brother -- well, he's a boy you like before he speaks and like more afterwards" (East of Eden, p.294).

Samuel's next interaction with Adam suggests that though Adam has begun to embrace life again he still has problems with accepting both of his sons equally. Instead he repeats the pattern he learned from his own father and allows his sons to contend for his acceptance just as he struggled with Charles



over Cyrus. Knowing he hasn't long to live, Samuel finally jolts Adam into a recognition that he is living in the past and in a world of fantasy. Samuel wants to help, but at the same time he realizes that Adam must act on his own, recognizing his duality, and exercising his free will to choose between good and evil (East of Eden, p.296).

When the twins are introduced, the reader realizes that 10 years have past. Each twin has changed or modified his name: Caleb has become Cal and Aaron is now Aron. Symbolically I believe that this change indicates each twin's unwillingness to be typed as either a Cain or an Abel or by the accomplishments of other Biblical figures. Yet they are only partially successful in modifying the preconception and judgments of their society. Moreover, the original Cain/Abel distinction is still maintained since Cal is a gardener and Aron raises rabbits (East of Eden, p.299).

On page 301, which structurally marks the center of the novel, Steinbeck presents his ultimate statement about moral ambiguity, again relating it to the Cain and Abel story. This is accomplished through Lee's more thorough examination of the original Biblical text which was discussed at the naming of the twins. Along with several wise Chinese scholars and a rabbi he has compared the various translations of the Hebrew verb "timshel" and found three different meanings: Thou shalt, implying promise; Do thou, implying order or command; and Thou mayest, implying choice.

While discussing the issue, Lee, Samuel and Adam again drink ng-ka-py, a liquor which Lee prepares and which in the initial argument about the Cain/Abel story was described as having a double taste (East of Eden, p.270). Now Samuel characterizes it by calling it the drink that tastes of good rotten apples. It is obvious that the paradox of the duality of opposites, of good mixed with evil and decay, serves to reinforce Steinbeck's picture of man's condition. In addition, the tasting of the apple may also suggest that finally the three protagonists of the novel have come to terms with the knowledge of good and evil, just as their original parents, Adam and Eve, were forced to do.

As Steinbeck says in The Journal, with this section the thesis is stated and

I have repeated that good things do not die. Did you feel that Samuel had got into Adam and would live in him? Men do change, do learn, do grow. That is what I want to get into that last (Journal of a Novel, p.165).

As the discussion continues, the three men illustrate this growth and change as they begin to know themselves and, in the process, learn a great deal about mankind. As Lee states

But the Hebrew word, the word 'timshel' -- 'Thou mayest' -- that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if 'Thou mayest' -- it is also true that 'Thou mayest not.' Don't you see?...Why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother, he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win." Lee's voice was a chant of triumph..."It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself into the lap of deity, saying 'I couldn't help it; the way was

set.' But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice, a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there....And I feel that I am a man. And I feel that a man is a very important thing -- maybe more important than a star. This is not theology. I have no bent toward gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked and never destroyed -- because 'Thou mayest'" (East of Eden, pp.303-304).

Before he leaves, Samuel decides that he must utilize the timshel doctrine to confront Adam with the facts he knows about Cathy. Significantly he has not done this before. However, now he chooses not to be careful and to use the medicine that might cure Adam but also might kill him. At this point, Lee questions whether Samuel is sure that his course of action is right; Samuel replies "Of course I'm not sure." Obviously more ambiguity about moral actions is evident. Subsequently, Lee expresses his feelings that the medicine of the truth is poison and will cause more evil than good, but Samuel counters with an example of how to treat a dog who has eaten strychnine. Such an animal needs the shock of more pain to counteract the poison and affect a cure. Thus two evils may beget a good.

Although Lee questions the change in Samuel and his assuming of a bulldog grip on life, Steinbeck's intention is to show the freeing effect of the words "thou mayest" on a man who now has a choice. Samuel's life changes from the single note - the life ending in defeat - to a full orchestra. As Samuel says

And my life which is ending seems to be going on to an ending wonderful. And my music has a new last melody like a bird song in the night.... 'Thou mayest rule over sin,' Lee. That's it. I do not believe all men are destroyed. I can name you a dozen who were not, and they are the ones the world lives by. It is true of the spirit as it is true of battles -- only the winners are remembered. Surely most men are destroyed, but there are others who like pillars of fire guide frightened men through the darkness. 'Thou mayest, Thou mayest!' What glory! It is true that we are weak and sick and quarrelsome, but if that is all we ever were, we would, millenniums ago, have disappeared from the face of the earth. A few remnants of fossilized jawbone, some broken teeth in strata of limestone, would be the only mark man would have left of his existence in the world. But the choice, Lee, the choice of winning! I had never understood it or accepted it before. Do you see now why I told Adam tonight? I exercised the choice. Maybe I was wrong, but by telling him I also forced him to live or get off the pot (East of Eden, pp.308-309).

Lee notes that Samuel has gone beyond him and discovered a type of immortality by passing on his understanding of life to another man. Later Samuel's last act of faith is indeed shown to be successful after his death, since Adam does act on the knowledge of Kate/Cathy and comes to the whorehouse to visit her. In this action Adam finally removes his Abel-like dream world of a good Cathy and is willing to accept her duality. Cathy, on the other hand, remains an adamant Cain figure, believing that evil is inherent and that nothing can ever change man's natural tendency toward sin.

As Adam and Cathy discuss the past, Cathy reveals how her parents were taken in by her pretended goodness and how James Grew also fell into her trap. Since these Abel figures did not recognize that evil and good were intermixed, Cathy has assumed that all Abels were this ignorant. Yet Cathy

realizes when she meets Samuel Hamilton that her assumption is wrong. For Cathy knew that Samuel could see through her, and, to her dismay, it now seems as if he has passed on that ability to Adam.

Adam feels that Samuel's truth, though harsh, has indeed set him free of Cathy. Through his belief in the new revelation, he too can exercise God's promise to Cain and choose to conquer over sin, instead of succumbing to evil. But his freedom is not so easily won since Cathy, the epitome of evil, makes every effort to convince him that the whole world is sinful and that good will never triumph. Cathy does this by showing the pictures of the depravity practiced in the whorehouse: the pictures which will be used to destroy reputations and prove that all good is sullied with filth. Frustrated that Adam seems to be unperturbed by this evidence, Cathy shouts, "I'll have you begging to get in here. I'll have you screaming at the moon. No one has ever escaped" (East of Eden, p.322).

However, Adam sees through this wall of hate and discovers fear, a feeling Cathy is unwilling to admit is a part of her.

"I know what you hate. You hate something in them you can't understand. You don't hate their evil. You hate the good in them you can't get at. I wonder what you want, what final thing" (East of Eden, p. 323).

Cathy is enraged by the accuracy of Adam's insight and uses a final weapon in a last-ditch effort to destroy Adam's

developing new world of freedom. She reveals that she slept with Adam's brother Charles. Adam, a naive Abel, at first refuses to believe it - to deny its possibility. However, that is not a real victory; it is only fooling himself. The victory comes when he realizes that it doesn't matter. Cathy no longer has a hold over him. As Steinbeck describes him in Chapter 26 the reader sees the change:

Samuel's funeral and the talk with Kate should have made him (Adam) sad and bitter, but they did not. Out of the gray throbbing an ecstasy arose. He felt young and free and filled with a hungry gaiety (East of Eden, p. 327).

By the time Adam arrives home he is free, and the significance of 'timshel' on his actions is apparent.

When Adam returns, he drinks more ng'ka-py with Lee, destroying the myth that the apple or fall of man must be destructive to all other men who have descended from the first Adam. It also contradicts the Calvinistic doctrine of election which contends that God does not measure the precepts of His Law by human strength, but, after ordering what is right, freely bestows on His elect the power of fulfilling it.(26) The two discuss Samuel Hamilton's heritage and how he has left a piece of himself there with them. "Maybe both of us have got a piece of him," said Lee. "Maybe that's what immortality is" (East of Eden, p.331). Consequently, heartened by Adam's freedom, Lee begins to seek what he

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(26)Calvin, Vol. I, ch. V, p.275.

considers essential for his own independence.

But despite such victories , the Cain and Abel story still persists in the narrative in the characters of Cal and Aron. The boys go hunting and successfully shoot a rabbit. Repeating moral ambiguity and at the same time reversing the original story, Steinbeck has the Cain figure Caleb magnanimously offer the credit for the kill to the Abel figure Aron. Moreover, since it is the Cain figure that is associated with the fruits of the soil, Cal's success as a hunter is also unexpected. Surprisingly, there is no jealousy between the Cain and Abel figures here although there is a need for acceptance and love by Cal. Fulfilling this need without rejection, of course, remains one of the greatest human challenges.

When the boys return to the house, Steinbeck introduces the second love interest in the novel, Abra Bacon. An Abel figure, ironically she has also felt the rejection of her father since Mr. Bacon had wanted a son rather than a daughter. As the story develops it will become more evident that Abra like Samuel and Lee is also successful in combining both opposites into a single personality. Although some critics associate her unusual name with magic, abracadabra, I believe it is much more likely that she is the female Abraham, the mother of God's chosen race.

The Bacons encourage Adam to move closer to town to let his children benefit from the schools. As Mr. Bacon says,

"All things come to men who know. Yes, I'm a firm believer in the torch of learning" (East of Eden, p.343). Mr. Bacon here is advocating head knowledge as the reason for Adam's move but, in addition, the sensitive reader recognizes it will bring knowledge of his soul as well. As a result of this conversation, the reader is prepared for Adam's moving yet closer to Eden. As Steinbeck says in Journal of a Novel:

Now as you well know Adam and his family must move down the river toward the mouth. They will stop in Salinas for this generation. The last part will be at Moss Landing where the river enters the sea. This was the plan from the beginning, and it is going to be followed so that my physical design remains clear and intact (Journal of a Novel, p.179).

So that even though East of Eden is not Eden, it is not insuperably far away (Journal of a Novel, p.155).

In addition, this move is related to Steinbeck's explanation of how Part III of the novel is a reversal of Part I. As Steinbeck says,

In the first part the burden was with Adam who was Abel. Charles was the dark principle who remained dark. In Part III, I am going to try to do the opposite. Caleb is my Cain principle. I am going to put the burden of experience through his eyes and his emotions. And since every man has Cain in him he will be fully well understood (Journal of a Novel, p.171).

In Part IV, Caleb/Cain will move even closer to Eden, and he too will have to exercise a choice.

Suddenly as Mr. Bacon is speaking of moving and of knowledge, Adam for the first time sees Charles and recognizes the great need of his brother. He decides he will make a reconciliatory attempt with his nearest relative. While the



adults converse, the children also talk, and the rivalry of the twins increases: this time not over their father's approval but over Abra. Critic John Fontenrose suggests that in this episode Steinbeck may have been aware of an apochryphal story regarding Cain and Abel in which they argued over which of their sisters they would marry.(27) Even if this is not the case the theme of rejection and guilt again surfaces. The rabbit mentioned previously suddenly becomes only Cal's and it is Aron/Abel who in jealousy cries out, "It was my ---" (East of Eden, p.346). Yet despite Cal's talents, Abra prefers Aron with "his sunny hair, tight-curved now and his eyes that seemed near to tears, and she felt the longing and itching burn in her chest that is the beginning of love" (East of Eden, p.347). Cal senses this rejection, and in his jealousy over Abra's refusal of his gift of the bloodied rabbit, he tries to find her weakness and a way to hurt her. Soon he discovers that her vulnerability consists in her desire to be an adult despite her sometimes childish nature. Therefore he suggests that the box which Aron is preparing contains not only the clean rabbit but another animal -- perhaps a snake. This causes Abra to reject Aron's gift as well, considering it foolish and thus giving the other twin a similar feeling of rejection and placing Cal in a superior role.

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(27)Fontenrose, p.122.

After the Bacons leave, Steinbeck reveals that Lee's plan for his own freedom includes his own bookstore and leaving the Trask family, but before he departs, Lee also urges Adam to expand his freedom. Like Mr. Bacon, he speaks of knowledge, but he is not referring to the knowledge of schools. Instead, he urges Adam to share his knowledge of Cathy with his boys. Adam is hesitant, preferring to leave the twins with a fantasy rather than the truth which will hurt. However, Lee objects to this judgment and again affirms that truth can set people free. He proceeds to tell how his father was able to free him from guilt about his own mother's death.

Although this tale is again a sidelight or detour from the main plot, and has been criticized for its sentimentality and ultimately for its lack of believability, it too reinforces the theme of moral ambiguity. Lee's parents are shown as Chinese immigrants who hope to escape the prejudice and suffering they live under. They too are searching for a new Eden but must also hide true identities in order to secure it. This is done by Lee's mother posing as a boy in order to avoid problems with other men. But as Adam's Eden is destroyed by Cathy, so Lee's parents' dream is crushed when his mother's hidden female identity is discovered. The result is a mass gang rape by the sexually frustrated men which results in both death and life. The rape is not shown as criminal but arising spontaneously out of man's nature and

afterwards regretted by the workers. However, as a result of their fury, Lee's mother dies from the attack, and Lee is born. Some good comes out of evil, as Lee points out.

"Before you hate those men you must know this. My father always told it at the last: No child ever had such care as I. The whole camp became my mother. It is beauty--a dreadful kind of beauty. And now good night. I can't talk any more" (East of Eden, p.360).

Adam, impressed by Lee's story of freedom in truth, writes his brother, searching for reconciliation and hoping to renew their relationship on the basis of truth. In fact, Adam now partially recognizes that he was a part of what his brother had become, and also that he had typed Charles as evil without really trying to understand him (East of Eden, p.362).

As Chapter 29 begins, Steinbeck again provides time to reflect for his reader by inserting a chapter on the automobile. Again he was taken to task for including extraneous material, but in addition to providing time for reflection, this episode also serves to show how the pace of the new century was increasing and how lives were changing as a result. As Steinbeck says in Journal,

The whole tempo of the book is going to change just as the tempo of the times changes. It will speed and rage then (Journal of a Novel, p.151).

I have been planting the book full of restlessness which precedes change. Just as history seems to ride up a series of plateaus, so it seems to me that a man's life goes - up a little and then down and then a flat place, and then another quick change and another plateau (Journal of a Novel, p.179).

The automobile and Adam's eventual plan to send lettuce packed

in ice to the east in railroad cars are only a few parts of this significant change of the 20th century. However, it is important to notice that in each of these changes Steinbeck reaffirms that man has a choice about his identity. Even the characters who only enter the story for a brief moment have this freedom. They can be Joes or Roys (East of Eden, p.369), Cains or Abels, depending on their free will.

Chapter 30 returns to the Trask narrative as the reader discovers that Charles Trask has died, alone, isolated and unloved. When informed of their uncle's death, the boys have ambiguous feelings: they hope he was rich and that they will inherit money and yet their father tells them to be sad over the loss. Charles' death repeats the cyclical pattern of all Cains who in their guilt cut themselves off from salvation. This illustrates the major thesis of East of Eden that events in life will occur and reoccur not because of fate but due to the fact that man lets them reoccur. Like his father Cyrus, Charles dies miserably having "pinched his dollars until the eagle screamed" (East of Eden, p.372). Ironically, he also leaves the same legacy \$100,000 and decrees that it will again be divided by C/A figures, Cathy and Adam. Certainly there is ironic reversal once again in the novel as a Cain figure dies and an Abel figure benefits. Good and evil are inextricably mixed.

At this point, Cal's similarity to his Uncle Charles is pointed up in his actions. As Charles once controlled Adam,

Cal is now able to manipulate Aron, and suddenly he realizes that he can outthink and outplan his brother in everything. With this feeling of superiority comes jealousy that his talents are not recognized. He allows evil to take over his life, but Aron recognizes his ploy and causes Cal to feel remorse.

Aron said slowly, "I wouldn't want to know that. I'd like to know why you do it. You're always at something. I just wonder why you do it. I wonder what's it good for."

A pain pierced Cal's heart. His planning suddenly seemed mean and dirty to him. He knew that his brother had found him out. And he felt a longing for Aron to love him. He felt lost and hungry, and he didn't know what to do (East of Eden, p.374-375).

Steinbeck then shifts his scene to Adam asking Lee's opinion about Charles' will. Lee notes that Adam should do the talking and "I will know from your talk whether I can offer an honest opinion or whether it is better to reassure you in your own" (East of Eden, p.376). Adam of course is afraid of how Kate will use her share of the estate for evil but Lee says

That is a great deal of money. A sizable chunk of good or evil could be done with it. Maybe you'll have to think for your brother...Saints can spring from any soil. Maybe with this money she would do some fine thing. There's no springboard to philanthropy like a bad conscience (East of Eden, p.378).

Yet at the same time Lee feels that Adam's freedom is not complete enough to escape his tendency to prejudge. He will be ruled by his heritage of guilt rather than the potential for freedom. He says to Adam,

"You don't have a choice, do you?...Your course is drawn. What you will do is written--written in every breath

you've ever taken. I'll speak any way I want to. I'm crotchety. I feel sand under my skin. I'm looking forward to the ugly smell of old books and the sweet smell of good thinking. Faced with two sets of morals, you'll follow your training. What you call thinking won't change it. The fact that your wife is a whore in Salinas won't change a thing" (East of Eden, p.379).

Here Steinbeck seems to reverse his position on free will, acknowledging the Calvinistic concept of depravity as dominant in man's fallen nature. The training he speaks of is more than role-modeling. It is the tradition of man to succumb to temptation and defeat rather than to fight it. Indeed, man is trapped in the paradox of his own dual nature and in general seems preoccupied with the negative part of his being. In fact, Cal, who has overheard this conversation, ends the chapter with a prayer since he fears that what Lee has said to Adam is also true of himself: his course has also been preplanned and can't be changed. His prayer is that of a rejected Cain.

"Dear Lord," he said, "let me be like Aron. Don't make me mean. I don't want to be. If you will let everybody like me, why, I'll give you anything in the world, and if I haven't got it, why, I'll go far to get it. I don't want to be mean. I don't want to be lonely. For Jesus' sake. Amen" (East of Eden, p.379-380).

But surprisingly, Adam's freedom is strong enough that he does not follow his initial decision to withhold the inheritance from Kate. Instead he exercises his choice to rule over evil and confronts his former wife with Charles' letter, offering her a share of the estate. Kate, of course, does not understand Adam's newfound safe feeling and is again

threatened by her lack of control of him. What is also significant is that Adam has acted on his own without Lee making his decision, and that by using his own self-will he can more completely destroy his fear of evil and of Kate's power over him. In fact, he again senses that it is Kate rather than himself who is fearful, and he confronts her with his knowledge.

Adam went on, astonished at his own thoughts, "But you--yes, that's right--you don't know about the rest. You don't believe I brought you the letter because I don't want your money. You don't believe I loved you. And the men who come to you here with their ugliness, the men in the pictures--you don't believe those men could have goodness and beauty in them. You see only one side, and you think--more than that, you're sure--that's all there is...

...I seem to know that there's a part of you missing. Some men can't see the color green, but they may never know they can't. I think you are only a part of a human. I can't do anything about that. But I wonder whether you ever feel that something invisible is all around you. It would be horrible if you knew it was there and couldn't see it or feel it. That would be horrible" (East of Eden, p.384-385).

After Adam's visit to Kate, Steinbeck arranges for the Trasks to interact one more time with the Hamiltons as Adam decides to move and plans to rent Dessie Hamilton's house in Salinas. In Journal of a Novel, pages 91, 141, and 187, Steinbeck stresses that the section is still another counterpoint to his action. As a result, the reader is sidetracked to the Hamilton plot as Steinbeck explores the motivation of Samuel's youngest daughter for rejecting her independence and for returning to the family home and to her brooding brother Tom, who earlier in the novel has held himself responsible for his

father's death. Like a Cain figure, Tom is isolated and surrounded by guilt. Although Dessie's move could have been a positive and redeeming factor in restoring him through love and affection, almost immediately after arriving at the ranch she falls ill. Although she despairs about her own illness, she desperately tries to affirm the 'timshel' doctrine to her brother. Even as Tom seems to have overcome his dour sad countenance, she resolves she will climb out of her gray ragbag (East of Eden, p.399). As brother and sister, they dream of travelling, of inventing and of success. At one point it seems as if they will indeed conquer, but then Tom attempts to cure Dessie's illness by giving her a dose of salts to counteract what he believes is a stomach ache but which in reality is appendicitis. As a result, Dessie dies, and Tom is again alone, thinking only of despair and defeat. Guilt overwhelms him (East of Eden, p.407), and despite the fact that he respects the 'timshel' heritage of his father, he chooses "Thou mayest not" rather than "Thou mayest." In fact in his rambling conversation before his suicide, Tom tries to explain his failure in an imaginary conversation with Samuel. Sadly he follows the Cain tradition which is really not his heritage and, although he acknowledges himself to be his brother's/sister's keeper, he admits defeat and commits suicide/self-murder to punish himself and thus atone for the unspeakable crime he feels he has done.

Significantly Steinbeck ends Part III of the novel here,



emphasizing the importance of the Dessie/Tom story to what will follow in Part IV as the Trasks also come face to face with their sins and their guilt and must make their choices of how to deal with it. They too have a heritage from their past that they must either reject or reaffirm.

Chapter 34 begins with the world story to stress the larger application of the thematic emphasis. The narrator remembers the deaths of three men and how their desire to be good and their desire to be loved caused both their frailty and their vices. Each man is described as possessing an intermingling of evil and good, yet the reaction at their deaths varies from "Thank God the son of a bitch is dead" to "What can we do now? How can we go on without him?" Steinbeck's point is that each of the three struggled with the one story of mankind and yet only one was successful.

We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is venerable as nothing else in the world is (East of Eden, p.415).

Despite this apparent digression, Steinbeck succeeds in emphasizing the universality of his theme and the importance of his interpiece.

Chapter 36 returns to the Trask story as Steinbeck subtly inserts his theme of moral ambiguity through another minor event, the pictures on the walls of Cal's and Aron's schoolrooms. All literary allusions, the pictures range from

Galahad, the knight errant of the Grail legend, to Laocoon, the Trojan priest who after giving a true warning about the Greeks was unwarrantedly killed by two snakes sent from Zeus. Each of these settings reveals an individual caught in a dilemma of choice and finding that good sometimes results in punishment as often as it results in rewards.

The plot then shifts back to the triangle of Cal/Abra/Aron. As they become closer friends in school, Abra reenacts the mother role for Aron, and he comes to see that his father may have lied to him about his real mother and her supposed death. The microcosm of the Trasks also reveals the progress of America through the increasing affluence of Adam and the new things he buys. Lee, who has left briefly, returns and supervises this renewal. Change is also seen in Adam's experiment to sell fresh lettuce in the east. Despite his apparent far-sightedness, the plan fails miserably, and the previous freedom of Adam starts to slip away. In fact, after Adam's financial setback, Lee asks if he is going to crawl back into his hole (East of Eden, p.439) and notes that he has the look on his face that he used to wear. Adam has lost his insight and has again succumbed to a Cain-like preoccupation with fate. He fails to see that good does not always produce good and that its fateful mixture with evil must be coped with over and over since it never ends.

Adam's failure also affects Cal and Aron who resent their father because they are now the butts of humor due to

his failure. In addition, Abra reacts negatively to Aron's unwillingness to confront his father and ask about the truth. yet she too is affected by moral ambiguity, as she says, "Sometimes I want to kill you--but Aron--I do love you so. I do love you so"(East of Eden, p.442). Meanwhile, Cal's jealousy of Aron grows since his own unacceptability to his father becomes more and more evident.

From his first memory Cal had craved warmth and affection, just as everyone does. If he had been an only child or if Aron had been a different kind of boy, Cal might have achieved his relationship normally and easily. But from the very first people were won instantly to Aron by his beauty and his simplicity. Cal very naturally competed for attention and affection in the only way he knew--by trying to imitate Aron. And what was charming in the blond ingenuousness of Aron became suspicious and unpleasant in the dark-faced, slit-eyed Cal. And since he was pretending, his performance was not convincing. Where Aron was received, Cal was rebuffed for doing or saying exactly the same thing. Associates he had, and authority and some admiration but friends he did not have. He lived alone and walked alone (East of Eden, pp.444-445).

Therefore while Aron avoids the truth about his mother and attempts to escape it, Cal actively seeks it out until he discovers the truth. He then reveals his knowledge to Lee who tries to explain to him the truth about both of his parents. But Cal, not listening, assumes his guilt by acknowledging that Cathy's evil is a part of him. Lee knows this is not so since he sees Aron's face in Cal in spite of the different coloring (East of Eden, p.448). He replies,

"Of course you may have that in you. Everybody has. But you've got the other too. Listen to me! You wouldn't even be wondering if you didn't have it. Don't you dare take the lazy way. It's too easy to excuse yourself because of your ancestry. Don't let me catch you doing

it! Now--look close at me so you will remember. Whatever you do, it will be you who do it--not your mother" (East of Eden, p. 449).

Again, I believe Steinbeck is reacting to the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin and predestination which leaves nothing to our wills or election.(28) This doctrine is of course soothing for the elect but frustrating and incomprehensible for the damned. After this revelation, Cal's reaction is a more intense devotion to and understanding of his father. This new reaction to his father is accompanied by an intense dislike of Aron whose passionate purity had reached smugness. And it is at this point that the possibility of "murdering" Aron by revealing the truth about their mother first occurs to Cal.

In addition to this evil thought, Cal also finds himself submitting to other bad inclinations. When he is picked up by the police in a gambling raid the father/son confrontation about evil is inevitable. In a sense, however, the ensuing argument is also redeeming since Adam confesses his failure to Cal and recognizes that by lying to him he is replaying the same ineffective father role of Cyrus Trask. "My father made a mold and forced me into it," he says. "I was a bad casting, but I couldn't be remelted. Nobody can be remelted. And so I remained a bad casting" (East of Eden, p.454). Here Adam denies his potential to be reborn, misunderstanding the words

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(28)See Calvin, Vol. I, ch. XXIV, p.241. See also Calvin, Vol. I, ch. XXI, p.210.

of Christ in John 3.(29) In this speech it is evident that Adam has rejected his previous freedom and again sees his life as structured and without choice. This of course will affect his sons negatively in the long run, but for now the openness of the conversation only indicates an encouraging acceptance and regeneration of the father and the son relationship. The acceptance of Adam thrills Cal, and the hate slips out of him as he makes a choice to rule over his sin. However, after letting it slip that he is aware that his mother is alive, Cal joins Adam in a pledge never to reveal this to Aron, whom they decide would be unable to stand it.

Cal's next step in his redemptive effort to deny evil's power and to affirm man's free will, is to confront his mother, whom he follows for a week. The intermingling of good and evil is again stressed when they meet, for as Cal had seen his own image in Adam's eyes (East of Eden, p.453), he now realizes when he looks at his mother "in the set and color of her eyes and hair and even in the way she held her shoulders - high in a kind of semishrug - that Aron looked very like her" (East of Eden, p.461). Even though Cal admits that his wish to see her is just curiosity, Kate is afraid of his motives just as she was afraid of Adam's. Consequently she decides to probe deeper into his motives and invites him to her room, a lean-to set off from the rest of her house,

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(29)See also Calvin, Vol. II, ch. XVI, p.100.

indicating her essential isolation from humanity.

Again minutiae play a part in reinforcing the theme. Kate has arthritis and tells Cal he will get it. Tangentially Steinbeck is attesting to the "natural" assumption that man inherits all his characteristics, both physical and emotional, from his parents, a fact which the 'timshel' doctrine would deny.

Another of the minutiae which appears in this chapter is the fact that the light hurts Kate's eyes. This is also symbolic, for the light of knowledge that Cal brings into her life is a knowledge which reveals her blackness and increases her despair and her sense of loneliness. As Calvin notes in The Institutes, "when the refulgence of God or good is exhibited, even the brightest objects, will, in comparison, be covered with darkness.(30) Kate's sense of evil allows her nothing to exult in. She suspects everyone of ulterior motives, even doubting Adam's positive motives in restoring her to health before they were married. She sees all his actions as a ploy, a means to tie her down and tell her what to do.

Throughout the conversation Cal asserts the true meaning of his name (Caleb, the one who got to the Promised Land) and emphasizes his full potential to break out of guilt and evil. Steinbeck intends him to reaffirm the belief that man can by

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(30)Calvin, Vol. I, ch. I, p.39.

choice establish a new Eden and need not be trapped in terror at evil. But like his father Cal still fluctuates in his belief about man's ability to emerge victorious. He questions Kate, "Did you ever have the feeling like you were missing something? Like as if the others knew something you didn't--like a secret they wouldn't tell you" (East of Eden, p.465). But as he leaves he asserts,

"I was afraid I had you in me."

"You have," said Kate.

"No, I haven't. I'm my own. I don't have to be you."

"How do you know that?" she demanded.

"I just know. It just came to me whole. If I'm mean, it's my own mean" (East of Eden, p.466).

As a result of this assertion, instead of Kate creating shock and worry in Cal as she had intended, Cal, like his father before him, discovers her own fear, a fear of isolation and loneliness which envelops her whole being.

The fear that Cal has seen in Kate has been growing for some while, a fact which Steinbeck relates through a flashback. Others have seen through her, including a blackmailer named Ethel, who is aware of her involvement in Faye's death. Eventually Steinbeck leaves Kate in her paranoid condition, extremely fearful of her ultimate recognition that pure evil does not go unpunished and that there is good in the world.

He then shifts back to the twins and their relationship. Having confronted Kate, Cal becomes positive toward his brother again, offering to help Aron finish school a year

earlier and at the same time moving him away to college and precluding his discovery of his mother's identity. Cal also develops a plan for pleasing his father through a farming venture. Thus he rejects part of the Cain role, jealousy, but keeps another part, the role of farmer. Depending on increased prices due to the war, he and Will Hamilton invest in bean futures and plan to make a fortune when the price soars. Cal plans to use this money to pay back Adam for the fortune he lost in the lettuce fiasco. The plot has now been carefully set for a parallel situation to the past. Charles' gift of the knife and Adam's present of the stray dog to Cyrus are repeated in Aron's gift of education, career and upright life, and Cal's gift of money to Adam.

By this time, Aron has rejected any part of his Cain feelings, preferring instead to pursue the ministry and block out the evil as non-existent. In his opinion his decision is virtuous, but his concept of attaining good is a warped idea of a true religion. Even the church must leave room for moral ambiguity and the interaction of good and evil. As Rev. Rolf explains to Aron,

"I know how you feel," Mr. Rolf said earnestly. "But there I cannot go along with you. I can't think that our Lord Jesus would want his priesthood withdrawn from service to the world. Think how he insisted that we preach the Gospel, help the sick and poor, even lower ourselves into filth to raise sinners from the slime. We must keep the exactness of His example always before us" (East of Eden, p. 489).

Rolf cites the fact that even the most evil people come to



church services and mentions the poor madame from the whorehouse, who ironically is Aron's mother. But Aron persists in his wish for "Someplace to withdraw. Sometimes I feel dirty. I want to get away from the dirt and be clean" (East of Eden, p.489). Since Mr. Rolf's advice has no effect, Lee also tries to rectify Aron's revulsion with the world and to explain that good and evil are inseparable and that the situation is not as bad as Aron thinks.

Lee put his arm around the broad shoulders to comfort him. "You're growing up. Maybe that's it," he said softly. "Sometimes I think the world tests us most sharply then, and we turn inward and watch ourselves with horror. But that's not the worst. We think everybody is seeing into us. Then dirt is very dirty and purity is shining white.....Try to believe that things are neither so good nor so bad as they seem to you now.....Go through the motions. Sam Hamilton said that. Pretend it's true and maybe it will be (East of Eden, p. 493).

However, Aron goes off to college without resolving his conflict and finds himself even more unhappy in his world. In addition his Puritan perception of original sin has placed guilt only on others, failing to see the same strains of evil in himself. He envisions himself as one of the elect, complete with God's approval. This is especially true of his relationship with Abra, which is finally broken due to Aron's excessive commitment to good.

Following his father's pattern of creating a fantasy world of beauty, Aron rejects the 'timshel' doctrine and repeats his father's mistake of making up a personality for the woman he loves. As Abra says, "He's made someone up, and

it's like he put my skin on her. I'm not like that--not like the made-up one" (East of Eden, p. 496). She also confides in Lee how difficult it is to live up to Aron's dream. She would rather be herself. Then Abra questions Lee about Kate, and, the wise Oriental, although he perceives the answer to the Trask problem, refuses to answer. It is a problem that must be solved by the family members and not by an outside force. Lee can only function as an encouragement or as a sounding board.

Later in the chapter, Lee finds out from Cal that his present - the money from the beans - has finally been realized. In fact, not only has Cal made back the \$5000 stake that Lee advanced him but he has also made \$15,000 for his father. Cal's emotions are high as he anticipates his father's pleasure. However, knowing he is a Cain figure and recognizing Adam's fluctuation between guilt and freedom, the reader is already apprehensive about his success.

In Chapter 45, Steinbeck shifts away from the Trask narrative to allow the reader time to contemplate the premonitions of impending disaster. Joe Valery, Kate's bouncer at the whorehouse, is examined as another Cain figure. Like others of his kind, he has assumed that evil is his only choice in life. His code of life was as follows.

1. Don't believe nobody. The bastards are after you.
2. Keep your mouth shut. Don't stick your neck out.
3. Keep your ears open. When they make a slip, grab on to it and wait.
4. Everybody's a son of a bitch and whatever you do they

- got it coming.
5. Go at everything roundabout.
  6. Don't never trust no dame about nothing.
  7. Put your faith in dough. Everybody wants it. Everybody will sell out for it (East of Eden, p.501).

Obviously Joe's credo contains a negative outlook on life, relying on deceptions and tricks instead of believing in his fellow man and his potential to choose good. Hired by Kate to stop Ethel's blackmail scheme, he also begins to see through his employer and to recognize that Kate's fear might be an angle which he can use to his advantage. Steinbeck also notes that Kate is beginning to feel for the first time, and in feeling, starting to recognize how useless her life has been. She is even drawn to her opposite in an indication of her developing humanity. She dreams of being with Aron and doing beautiful things (East of Eden, p.513). Yet she recognizes that both of them are untouched and untouchable - closed off from others by their extremes. Still, her protective and motherly nature asserts itself, as the following passage indicates.

...then she thought of Aron's beautiful face so like her own and a strange pain--a little collapsing pain--arose in her chest. He wasn't smart. He couldn't protect himself. The dark brother might be dangerous. She had felt his quality. Cal had beaten her. Before she went away she would teach him a lesson (East of Eden, p.513).

It is obvious that her evil strength is waning.

Chapter 46 returns to the world view with an emphasis on war. Considering that the novel was written after Steinbeck's journalistic experience in World War II and that it covers

three other major wars in its contents, I believe it is safe to assume that the wars in the novel function symbolically within the thematic scheme.

Certainly the Civil War, which begins the novel, is an appropriate symbol since it implies a fight between two parts of a unit and since the term could also be said to depict the major characters' struggle between their tendency for good and their tendency for evil. Inner wars and battles against "fated" actions are involved in the struggle man undertakes when he denies his original sin and chooses to rule over evil. In addition, war itself becomes a morally ambiguous action when the bad it involves is justified in the name of a greater good. Steinbeck and his sister Mary are also shown to be involved in the 'timshel' doctrine by the relation of a war incident, in which they mock a German American. They assume this man has the sin of his heritage and in their ignorance they and the town of Salinas hurt him deeply. The incident illustrates how easy it is even for children to follow the example of Cain and succumb to evil rather than assert their power over it.

Another irony involving war is the fact that Adam, who has hated war and military service, is appointed to the draft board. In the cyclical pattern of life, Adam, like his own father, sends other reluctant sons to war. This obligation is greater than Adam can handle. Reverting to his morose Cain-like side, he sees his role on the draft board with guilt

and becomes more and more depressed. Having lost his freedom and insight rather often during the course of the novel, once again he fails to acknowledge the choice which is his. Instead he retreats to his old pattern of feeling sorry for himself and considering his existence fated. Lee perceptively sees the problem and tries to help Adam distinguish the fine line between responsibility and blame. For Lee, 'timshel' is again the key (East of Eden, p.523).

Aron, on the other hand, has retreated to the Abel side of the spectrum. Safe at college he has developed the same unreal idealism and naivete which used to characterize his father. He has assumed advanced schooling will be heavenly and instead finds it to be ugly and boring. Eventually he decides to quit school and go back to the isolated ranch where his life began. He will retreat from society and enter a real Eden to seek seclusion. "There, after work of course, he could live in purity and peace with the world, cut off by the little draw. He could hide from ugliness--in the evening (East of Eden, p.524).

Chapter 48 stresses Steinbeck's balanced plan as it returns to Kate and Valery and shows that in some cases one evil will work to destroy another. Valery has begun to see the hold he might have over Kate, and, like a cornered animal, Kate now relies even more on a capsule of morphine which will bring her death rather than her admission that her vision of life as evil was wrong.

Meanwhile, Adam prepares for Aron's return from college.

Again the approach to the theme is subtle since the holiday set for Adam's return is Thanksgiving, paralleling the thank offerings of Cain and Abel in the Biblical story. For a while things go well. Only beneath the surface there is tension. "It was Cal's day. He had carved this day out for himself and he wanted it. He meant to have it" (East of Eden, p.538). But Aron receives more attention, and the result is a return of jealousy. Soon Cal begins to wallow in his sin. To be honest he acknowledges that he is enjoying the beating he is giving himself. He confesses that "By whipping himself he protected himself against whipping by someone else" (East of Eden, p.539). When he feels slighted by his father, he becomes more resentful of Adam's interest in Aron's college career. The discussion of college leads to more of Steinbeck's theory on how man has lost his self-knowledge. He may know more, but conversely he understands only a little.

"Maybe the knowledge is too great and maybe men are growing too small," said Lee. "Maybe, kneeling down to atoms, they're becoming atom-sized in their souls. Maybe a specialist is only a coward, afraid to look out of his little cage. And think what any specialist misses--the whole world over his fence" (East of Eden, p.541).

As a result of increased specialization and categorization of learning, Steinbeck contends, a wider perspective of understanding man has been lost; instead, the intellects have become isolated and unable to relate to fellow human beings. However, the college discussion becomes a relatively minor

rejection considering what happens after the Thanksgiving dinner when Cal's money gift is presented to his father and is summarily refused. Adam not only rejects the money, but he accuses Cal of evil, of robbing others, and of gaining a profit from the evil of war. Even more importantly he uses Aron's accomplishments as a touchstone for the type of success he would appreciate.

"No. I won't want it ever. I would have been so happy if you could have given me--well, what your brother has--pride in the thing he's doing, gladness in his progress. Money, even clean money, doesn't stack up with that." His eyes widened a little and he said, "Have I made you angry, son? Don't be angry. If you want to give me a present--give me a good life. That would be something I could value" (East of Eden, p.544).

Jealousy and revenge fill Cal's mind as he listens to Adam's inordinate praise of his twin brother Aron.

He fought the quiet hateful brain down, and it slipped aside and went about its work. He fought it more weakly, for hate was seeping all through his body, poisoning every nerve. He could feel himself losing control (East of Eden, p.544).

Again Lee tries to help Cal focus to understand Adam but more importantly to explain that Cal has options.

Lee said, "Stop it! Stop it, I tell you!"

"Stop what? What do you want me to stop?"

Lee said uneasily, "I told you once when you asked me that it was all in yourself. I told you you could control it--if you wanted."

"Control what? I don't know what you're talking about."

Lee said, "Can't you hear me? Can't I get through to you? Cal, don't you know what I'm saying?"

"I hear you, Lee. What are you saying?"

"He couldn't help it, Cal. That's his nature. It was the only way he knew. He didn't have any choice. But you have. Don't you hear me? You have a choice" (East of Eden, p.544).

Some critics have lambasted this passage as revealing the 'timshel' doctrine does not apply to everyone and that therefore Steinbeck's philosophy is flawed. However, Lee's words only suggest that Adam is part of an older generation who has grown up with a heritage of sin and guilt. Occasionally Adam breaks through that veil and sees his potential and his free will, but for the most part the cards are stacked against him. His belief in either the extreme of good or the extreme of evil has dominated him for so long that he has a tendency to fall into the rut - to be overly pious or overly cruel. To see a constant intermingling of the two extremes is different for him. He is used to being dominated by rather than ruling over sin. Adam's past actions control him as he finds it increasingly hard to assert his freedom against a heritage of despair.

Cal's reaction to Lee is to simply ignore his warning. "You'd think from your tone I'd killed somebody. Come off it, Lee. Come off it" (East of Eden, p.545). But Cal's analysis of the seriousness of his act is on target, for although he does not murder Aron to gain his revenge, he does destroy him by revealing his heritage and the truth about Kate. With the visit to the whorehouse and the revelation of his mother, Aron dies emotionally and decides to enlist in the army to destroy himself physically as well.

The revelation is also devastating to Kate who senses she is now surrounded by individuals who have conquered over



evil. She remembers being surrounded by "enemies" as a child and how she used to escape by reading "Alice in Wonderland." Like Alice, Kate decides she can withdraw from a world of reality of intermingled good and evil to a world of fantasy. "She was different - she had more than other people. She was smarter and stronger than other people. She had something they lacked" (East of Eden, p.552).

But suddenly, as she sees Cal's image in her memory, she realizes that the exact opposite is true. "They had something she lacked, and she didn't know what it was. Once she knew this, she was ready; and once ready, she knew she had been ready for a long time - perhaps all of her life" (East of Eden, p.553). What Kate recognizes is that other people could exercise a choice in life, whereas, like Alice, Kate had felt herself trapped. Such an existence makes life not worth the living, and Kate plans her suicide, eating her deadly dose of morphine even as Alice nibbled on her mushroom or drank the little bottles. Kate hopes the morphine will bring her peace, but even in the instant of her death, she is forced to acknowledge the failure of her life. She sees Cal and the glint of his eyes saying, "You missed something. They had something, and you missed it" (East of Eden, p.554).

Yet Kate's death is not the end of the novel nor of the Trasks' struggle to affirm 'timshel'. In Chapter 51, Steinbeck tells how good and evil interrelate as he describes how Kate and the sheriff maintained a relationship of balance,

trust and respect. Quinn is another of the rare individuals who knows that to live in the world one must accept its duality. Horace does this by not being surprised at Kate's pictures but realizing that they must be destroyed as well. He also realizes that Adam's world has never been completely real. "And Adam had been set apart--an invisible wall cut him off from the world. You couldn't get into him--he couldn't get out to you. But in that old agony there had been no wall." Yet "In his wife, Adam had touched the living world" (East of Eden, p.562).

Quinn visits Adam and tells him of Kate's death. He also informs him that Kate has left Aron a legacy of \$100,000. But Quinn is appalled when he discovers that Adam has kept Kate's identity from his son, and he suggests that the whole truth be told before it is too late. Ironically, his warning is unnecessary - the story of Cain and Abel has been repeated as Adam asks "Do you know where your brother is?" and Cal replies "How do I know? Am I supposed to look after him?" (East of Eden, p.564). The passage of course lacks subtlety, but I believe the complexity of Steinbeck's total design offsets the didactic presentation here. It is as if he spells out the message on one level and conceals it on others. Thus he allows the reader to choose whether he will delve deeply or whether he will be satisfied with only a superficial inspection of the thematic emphasis.

Thus, although Adam is unaware of the symbolic meaning

of Cal's words, Lee senses what has happened and seeks consolation in one of his precious books, The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. The book, he reveals, was stolen from Samuel Hamilton. There he reads,

"Everything is only for a day, both that which remembers and that which is remembered.

"Observe constantly that all things take place by change, and accustom thyself to consider that the nature of the universe loves nothing so much as to change things which are and to make new things like them. For everything that exists is in a manner the seed of that which will be."

Lee glanced down the page. "Thou wilt die soon and thou are not yet simple nor free from perturbations, nor without suspicion of being hurt by external things, nor kindly disposed towards all; nor dost thou yet place wisdom only in acting justly." (East of Eden, p.565).

The passage, of course, affirms Lee's belief in 'timshel' - that man can change and that the possibility of his perfection is attainable. But Lee is still unsure of how the 'timshel' doctrine will ultimately affect the Trasks.

Cal's guilt at what he has done to Aron overtakes him later in the evening.

He knew that he had to tell his guilt to his father and beg his forgiveness. And he had to humble himself to Aron, not only now but always. He could not live without that. And yet, when he was called out and stood in the room with Sheriff Quinn and his father, he was as raw and angry as a surly dog and his hatred of himself turned outward toward everyone--a vicious cur he was, unloved, unloving (East of Eden, p.567).

Suddenly Cal seeks to satisfy Aron by a sacrifice as he proceeds to burn the crisp \$1000 certificates which he had earned for his father. When Lee conveniently interrupts Cal, he again serves the Trasks as a mirror. He functions as an

alter-ego or psychiatrist as he helps Cal to understand what he has done and its consequence (East of Eden, p.569). Most importantly, he points out that Cal is really no different than any other human.

Did you ever think of yourself as snot-nose kid--mean sometimes, incredibly generous sometimes? Dirty in your habits, and curiously pure in your mind. Maybe you have a little more energy than most, just energy, but outside of that you're very like all the other snot-nose kids (East of Eden, p.570).

In fact he states the tendency toward moral dualism and ambiguity is evident in all Americans.

"We're a violent people, Cal. Does it seem strange to you that I include myself? Maybe it's true that we are all descended from the restless, the nervous, the criminals, the arguers and brawlers, but also the brave and independent and generous. If our ancestors had not been that, they would have stayed in their home plots in the other world and starved over the squeezed-out soil."

Lee went on, "That's why I include myself. We all have that heritage, no matter what old land our fathers left. All colors and blends of Americans have somewhat the same tendencies. It's a breed--selected out by accident. And so we're overbrave and overfearful--we're kind and cruel as children. We're overfriendly and at the same time frightened of strangers. We boast and are impressed. We're oversentimental and realistic. We are mundane and materialistic--and do you know of any other nation that acts for ideals? We eat too much. We have no taste, no sense of proportion. We throw our energy about like waste. In the old lands they say of us that we go from barbarism to decadence without an intervening culture. Can it be that our critics have not the key or the language of our culture? That's what we are, Cal--all of us. You aren't very different"(East of Eden, p.570).

Despite Lee's effort, the message doesn't sink into Cal, and no confession and absolution of his crime are made. Adam's health is failing, and it continues to deteriorate when he discovers that Aron has enlisted in the army. This, of

course, allows Cal to continue to wallow in his guilt and self-pity. Lee notices that Abra has been strangely absent from the Trask household and suggests that Cal try to see her since "If you keep this up you're going to feel worse, not better. You'd better open up. I'm warning you. You'd better open up" (East of Eden, p.574). When Cal does see Abra, she reveals that she has heard from Aron and that he has rejected her. But Abra is not too saddened since she has finally recognized that Aron was living in a dream world.

"I've tried to figure it out. When we were children we lived in a story that we made up. But when I grew up the story wasn't enough. I had to have something else, because the story wasn't true any more....Aron didn't grow up. Maybe he never will. He wanted the story and he wanted it to come out his way. He couldn't stand to know about his mother because that's not how he wanted the story to go--and he wouldn't have any other story. So he tore up the world" (East of Eden, pp.577-578).

In addition, a pure Aron is no longer for Abra since the taint of sin has also reached her family, and she has discovered that her own father is involved in some kind of evil.

Significant as this change in Abra is, a more important change has occurred in Adam. Still physically weak, he too begins to see that in a real world good and evil are mixed, and he finally is able to admit that, in spite of his wish to believe otherwise, his father, Cyrus Trask was a thief. Lee, of course, recognizes the ironies and perhaps the balances that are provided to men.

And he wondered what Adam meant, saying his father was a thief. Part of the dream, maybe. And then Lee's mind played on the way it often did. Suppose it were

true--Adam, the most rigidly honest man it was possible to find, living all his life on stolen money. Lee laughed to himself--now this second will, and Aron, whose purity was a little on the self-indulgent side, living all his life on the profits from a whorehouse. Was this some kind of joke or did things balance so that if one went too far in one direction an automatic slide moved on the scale and the balance was re-established? (East of Eden, p.583).

Lee perceives that Abra must be his ally if Cal is to be redeemed from his guilt. Therefore, when he sees her next he openly discusses the problem and enlists her help to save Cal. Happily, Cal begins to see more of Abra, and, as winter ends both symbolically and physically, Adam and Cal seem to be improving. Both experience a short period of spring and renewal. Adam's health improves, and the two young people begin to enjoy each other's company. Abra tries to reveal to Cal his misconception of evil by confessing her father's guilt. "You see," she replies, "you're not the only one!" (East of Eden, p.592). However, Cal will not lose his guilt as long as Aron's life is in the balance. And Steinbeck soon seals his fate as Chapter 54 reveals Aron's death in the war. Lee must decide whether to break the news to Adam and risk a possible stroke or withhold it from him.

He stared between his knees at the floor. "No," he said, "that's not my right. Nobody has the right to remove any single experience from another. Life and death are promised. We have a right to pain" (East of Eden, p.593).

Physically Adam is unable to take the stress of the news, and he does indeed have a stroke. Thus Cal's guilt returns doubly. Not only is he responsible for his brother's death, but possibly his father's as well. At last the confession

comes, but due to Adam's physical condition, the absolution does not follow.

"Can you hear me, Father? Can you understand me?" The eyes did not change or move. "I did it," Cal cried. "I'm responsible for Aron's death and for your sickness. I took him to Kate's. I showed him his mother. That's why he went away. I don't want to do bad things--but I do them."

He put his head down on the side of the bed to escape the terrible eyes, and he could still see them. He knew they would be with him, a part of him, all of his life (East of Eden, p.595).

The confession here echoes the apostle Paul's admission of his guilt in Romans 7:13-14. Here the doctrine of original sin is surprisingly affirmed by Cal, while elsewhere in the novel Steinbeck has other characters deny it. The ambiguity of man's nature is revealed in Paul's words which Cal paraphrases. "It was sin, working death in me through what is good."

Yet shortly after, Steinbeck again hedges. Once again Lee must serve as a tempering influence. He points out that Adam has said nothing and that Cal can't know how he feels. "You don't know he accused you. You don't know that" (East of Eden, p.597). But Cal is still despondent and seeks out Abra for advice, admitting his past as a confession of the evil which runs rampant through him and which he feels will control his future as well. Abra counters with her own evil heritage and the details of her father's embezzlement. In the light of such crimes, Cal's only thought is escape, and he invites her to a willow tree cave where she used to go with Aron to shut

out society. But Abra refuses to run away or to hide and urges Cal to return home.

Lee is waiting for them and once more they drink the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil - ng-ka-py, the good juice of rotten apples. Lee expresses his own frustration at the duality of life - the death of good Samuel Hamilton, the tossing and turning of his children by a vengeful god, but he knows his stupidity. He was wrong when he thought that the good were destroyed and the evil survived and prospered. He was wrong when he assumed that he had inherited only the impurities of God's handiwork and the fire or punishment which purifies it. Yet his image of God is inaccurate, for he notes

"Does a craftsman even in his old age, lose his hunger to make a perfect cup--thin, strong, translucent?" He held his cup to the light. "All impurities burned out and ready for a glorious flux, and for that-- more fire. And then either the slag heap or, perhaps what no one in the world ever quite gives up, perfection," He drained his cup and he said loudly, "Cal, listen to me. Can you think that whatever made us--would stop trying?" (East of Eden, p.600).

The words are Steinbeck's most glorious hope for mankind - that by conquering his feeling of inadequacy, inherited guilt and deserved punishment, man will eventually reach Eden again. This is of course man's ultimate paradox, realizing his imperfectability and yet persistently striving to reach perfection. Yet this paradoxical belief in the possibility of perfection in spite of its impossibility distinguishes and raises man from other animals. The struggle



continues through many generations with bad begetting good and vice versa.

The three, Lee, Cal and Abra, then decide to confront Adam, perhaps changed by his stroke into a new person. "There's damage in your brain, and it may be that you are a new thing in the world. Your kindness may be meanness now, and your bleak honesty fretful and conniving" (East of Eden, p.601). The other option is that his illness may be the refining which will perfect him as a person who can live under 'timshel' without regressing. Lee finally realizes he must intercede with greater vigor than ever before. He tells Adam the truth, trying once more for the effect of Samuel Hamilton. Even Lee's choice of words reflects his obligation. "I have to," said Lee. "If it kills him I have to. I have the choice," and he smiled sadly and quoted, "'If there's blame, it's my blame'" (East of Eden, p.602)-echoes Samuel's as he exercised his choice under timshel. As Adam hears Lee's plea that Cal is marked with guilt out of himself and that he has experienced a parallel rejection to that of Charles', Steinbeck describes Adam's eyes as "glowing with a terrible brightness" (East of Eden, p.602). Adam blesses Cal and instead of speaking his name as Lee orders he utters the final promise of timshel. In these words Adam makes his own choice to conquer sin, and he bequeaths the promise and potential to his son as well. This Caleb will reach the promised land of Eden while his twin counterpart, attracted by false gods, will

suffer the fate of his namesake and die in the desert. Finally through the burnt offerings of the deranged love letter, of the degrading and perverse pictures of sexual depravity and of Cal's money, the promise of 'timshel' has been obtained.

Thus in fifty-five chapters, Steinbeck has covered the fifty-five years from 1862 to 1917 and in a complex and artful manner has woven his theme into the fabric and texture of the work. For it is only by accepting a balance, an intermingling and even an ambiguity between good and evil that there is any real health for mankind. For there is reality, there is truth, and instead of man living the lie that he is constantly doomed to failure with no possible redemption, how glorious it is to have a choice.

Steinbeck has used both syncretic allegory and symphonic design (Journal of a Novel, p.155) to emphasize this point and the novel is astounding in its complexity. Its lack of popularity can only be attributed to Steinbeck's analysis of the literary times: speed and actions still provide the most interest for readers. It seems to me that when East of Eden receives due attention at last there will be "a revulsion for the immediate and a slight desire to return to the contemplative" (Journal of a Novel, p.150). A reading public desirous of self-knowledge and introspection of the human condition will have returned to appreciate its greatness.

Ultimately, Steinbeck's own original prologue perhaps

provides the best analysis of his own work.

some times I have felt that I held fire in my hands and spread a page with shining--I have never lost the weight of clumsiness, of ignorance, of aching inability.

A book is like a man--clever and dull, brave and cowardly, beautiful and ugly. For every flowering thought there will be a page like a wet and mangy mongrel, and for every looping flight a tap on the wing and a reminder that wax cannot hold the feathers firm too near the sun.....

But [the reader is] just like me, no stranger at all. He'll take from my book what he can bring to it. The dull witted will get dullness and the brilliant may find things in my book I didn't know were there.

And just as he is like me, I hope my book is enough like him so that he may find in it interest and recognition and some beauty as one finds in a friend (Journal of a Novel, pp.238-241).

I believe that East of Eden fulfills Steinbeck's prediction of being his masterpiece despite the minor flaws that it contains. It appeals to the reader because it delves deeply into the human soul and captures the truth of human existence. Admittedly, Steinbeck's occasional lapse into overly poetic prose and his random didactic explanations of his thematic emphasis do detract from the final product. However, the careful and intricate planning of the novel, and its innovative expansion of a specific tale of individuals to provide a world view enhance its value.

Although Steinbeck does force the reader to accept events which are very unlikely (e.g. the Chinese scholars and the Jew studying the passage from Genesis) in my opinion his crafting of the story is so well done that the sensitive reader is willing to suspend disbelief. East of Eden then becomes Steinbeck's most positive statement on man's fallen

condition. Moral ambiguity must be faced; in fact, as has been shown in this chapter, it is an integral part of existence. Those who seek to wall out or refuse to accept the duality of man's nature are at best sub-human. Ultimately man's acceptance of his own duality is essential to working toward the defeat of his Cain sign, his fallen condition, his depravity. Sin is, according to Steinbeck, naturally human but it does not follow that it must be naturally bad. It may indeed result in good. Another essentially human trait is the religious - yet this also is not automatically positive and can be warped for un-Godly purposes. In East of Eden, Steinbeck portrays both paradoxes and exhorts his readers to struggle with and recognize that there is indeed a limit to evil and that its seeming limitlessness is primarily a result of man's inability to accept that even what he calls evil is a necessary and perhaps even a productive element of society.(31)

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(31)See Pratt, p.38.

## CHAPTER VI

### NOT LOST IN LOSS:

#### THE FAINTING COURAGE OF THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

Although Steinbeck's Winter of Our Discontent was greeted with much anticipation when it was published in 1961, vicious critics had soon ripped it to shreds, and Steinbeck had despondently accepted their verdict of failure. One has only to glance at Reloy Garcia's recapitulation of critical analysis to sense the enormity of negative comments. Garcia cites Benjamin DeMott's charge that "Steinbeck's central situation never becomes a situation because it interests its creator merely as an excuse for chatter about how to be really good." Furthermore, Garcia himself argues that "Steinbeck put the art after the hearse; the theme rides the esthetics off into the plains of mediocrity while Steinbeck the sage displaces the novelist."(1)

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(1)Reloy Garcia, "Steinbeck's The Winter of Our Discontent," in A Study Guide to Steinbeck: A Handbook to His Major Works, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi (Metuchen, N.J., 1974), p.252.

Garcia also quotes Warren French's criticism of "failure to create sharply defined characters and Granville Hicks' perception that what is wrong with the novel is simple - that it isn't plausible."(2) Surprisingly he also agrees with Howard Levant in his analysis of the structural defects of the novel. Levant, who calls Winter of Our Discontent a sermonic platform, an essayish, mechanical, finally incoherent parable," sees "its failure in part due to point of view and in part to a lack of conviction in the materials - which are petty in detail, querulous in tone and thoroughly ambiguous in their fictive embodiment."(3) Garcia also laments the shift in point of view stating that "the transition bumps against the reader's sensibility."(4) He also feels that Steinbeck has diluted "his work for easier consumption" and that he repeatedly breaks the integrity of his works with editorial laments on the moral character of America and the world and with "glucosity of sentiment that would make a diabetic cringe."(5)

Like Garcia, most critics have also approached Winter of Our Discontent with preconceived notions. For example, Joseph Fontenrose decries the fact that Steinbeck does not solve the problems that he raises and that "he fails to dip beneath the surface of society: he does not probe the social and economic

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(2)Garcia, p.252.

(3)Levant, p.289.

(4)Garcia, p.253.

(5)Garcia, p.254.

reasons for the decay of moral standards."(6)

However, a recent rereading by scholar Donna Gerstenberger has pointed out Steinbeck's debt to T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," and Lawrence William Jones has drawn attention to Steinbeck's similarities to such writers as John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut and John Updike. Perhaps what both Jones and Gerstenberger ask of the critical reader of Winter of Our Discontent is the ability to come to the story without expectations, to utilize Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking, or to see beyond the obvious. Gerstenberger's insightful analysis points out the many parallels in the novel to T.S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland." Hawley here is the questor, the Knight Templar, searching for answers to insoluble questions. In addition, the details used by Steinbeck provide, according to Gerstenberger, significant evidence of his dependence on the poem to provide analogies and to illumine his thematic emphasis. The presence of the Tarot pack, a Madame Sosostriis (Margie Young-Hunt), a Teiresias (Joey Morphy) and a Mr. Eugenides (Mr. Biggers) all suggest a Steinbeck reliance on Eliot, but Gerstenberger suggests the similarities go even deeper. She cites the substitution of secular rituals in the absence of more meaningful sacred ones, the protests to the empty secularized world in nonsense phrases, and the questioning of "Four

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(6)Fontenrose, p.137.

quartets" in an attempt to find magic answers which will unlock the prison of self. She also draws attention to the lines from the poem about "the corpse in the garden" relating it to the destruction of both Marullo and Danny Taylor in the novel. Finally, Gerstenberger cites the setting of "The Wasteland" - the arid climate, the lack of wind and the inability of Ethan, the questor, to find a sea change, a life-giving water.

Gerstenberger's conclusion states

Hawley's experience of evil is complete; his quest has led him into the heart of corruption, which daily affords the inhabitants of his New England wasteland their portion of hypocritical reality. The way out is not as clear as the way in, however, and the novel ends as does the poem, with the arid plain much in evidence, the quest having altered little except the individual's own knowledge of the meaning of experience--past and present. The solutions are no easier, it would seem, in 1961 than they were in 1922.(7)

She suggests that the richness of imagery indicates the complexity of Winter of Our Discontent. Furthermore, such intricate literary allusions indicate that superficial critics should beware of simplistic and hasty condemnation based on predetermined expectations.

Jones defends Winter of Our Discontent on other grounds, contending that Steinbeck, always an experimenter in genre as well as form, has finished his career as a fabulist. Citing the larger meanings of such works as The Pearl and East of

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(7) Donna Gerstenberger. "Steinbeck's American Waste Land," Modern Fiction Studies, XI (Spring, 1965), 65.



Eden, Jones argues that the form which Steinbeck uses in Winter is very close to fable. Consequently, he argues that although limitations in the text result due to this choice, critics are unfair to the work if they judge it with the expectations placed on realistic fiction. (8)

However, despite earlier condemnation of the book on various principles, it must be allowed that the Steinbeckian theme of moral ambiguity remains constant in his final novel. Steinbeck is still fascinated by the intermingling, and he is still unwilling to give up struggling with the paradox of man's duality. Several critics have noted that the characters are split, paired and doubled as Steinbeck portrays the shifting moral values inherent in almost everyone in New Baytown.(9) But few have noticed that even the minor characters evidence duality and that Steinbeck complicates matters even more by syncretically combining 'good' and 'evil' traits within each character. Thus Hawley is simultaneously Christ, Pilate, Judas and his Puritan forefathers and Margie Young-Hunt is at one point both Eve, Lilith, the whore of Babylon and Ethan's potential salvation. Similarly, characters such as Joey Morphy, Mr. Baker, Marullo and Danny also possess a dual heritage.

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(8)See Lawrence William Jones, Steinbeck as Fabulist, ed. Marston LaFrance (Muncie, Indiana, 1972).

(9)See Levant, p. 298 and Paul McCarthy, John Steinbeck (New York, 1980), pp.132-133.

The first indication that this final novel also repeats Steinbeck's best-loved theme is its title. It is the opening soliloquy of Shakespeare's Richard III and is spoken by the title character himself. Richard says:

"Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York; / And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house / In the deep bosom of the ocean buried. / Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths, / Our bruised arms hung up for monuments, / Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings, / Our dreadful marches to delightful measures. / Grim-visaged War hath smoothed his wrinkled front, / And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds / To fright the souls of fearful adversaries, / He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber / To the lascivious pleasing of a lute..... / And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days, / I am determined to prove a villain / And hate the idle pleasures of these days. / Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous, / By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams, / To set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other; / And if King Edward be as true and just / As I am subtle, false, and treacherous, / This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up / About a prophecy which says that 'G' / Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be."(10)

This soliloquy effectively sets up the theme of opposites , for in Shakespeare's play, the winter of discontent has been miraculously transformed into summer by the ascension of the Yorkist monarch and the dethroning of Henry VI, the Lancastrian claimant to the throne.(11) Furthermore, Richard himself is revealed as a paradox. Outwardly he appears to be the helpful servant of his brothers, King Edward IV and the Duke of Clarence, but

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(10)William Shakespeare, Richard III (New York,1964),pp.33-34.  
(Signet Classic Edition)

(11)Levant,p.299.

inwardly he is plotting their deaths and his own ascension to power. As Reloy Garcia notes

Just as Shakespeare's hero-villain, Richard, degenerates in the conflict with his brother from a cold Machiavellian plotter to an emotional sinner who derives pleasure from pain and evil, so too does Ethan degenerate in conflict with his "brother," Danny Taylor, over the "kingdom" of Taylor's Meadow.(12)

Since Richard is the epitome of duplicity, the literary allusion expands the reader's expectations and suggests a complexity of structure as Steinbeck combines many symbols and cross references in order to make a moral point.

As Chapter I begins, the discerning reader quickly notes that the theme of opposites begins almost immediately. Ethan Allen Hawley, the protagonist, comically jokes over serious matters like religion and Good Friday, despite the fact that his name suggests his personality as a holy (hawley) man. He is not unlike his Revolutionary namesake, Ethan Allen, who can be historically identified as a rambunctious "green mountaineer" patriot of mixed motives who risked everything for principles, and who captured Ticonderoga from the British and subsequently worked for independent status for Vermont, playing off the British against his own countrymen.(13) Steinbeck also establishes Ethan's dual New England heritage early in the novel and reinforces the parallel to the original. Ethan is from the stock of both puritans and

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(12)Garcia,p.244.

(13)Garcia, p.245.

pirates, not unlike Henry Morgan, the pirate hero of Steinbeck's first novel, Cup of Gold. This duality of heritage has been rationalized from the beginning of Ethan's ancestry. According to Mary, the evil perpetrated by the pirates has been condoned since it was done in the name of the government with letters of "what you call it from the Continental Congress." (14) Consequently, Ethan's upright Puritan moral background is intact although the references to the historical Ethan Allen and to Richard III suggest that the heroic has become the mock heroic. Yet the resulting feeling of election is not accompanied by pride. Although he is seen by the townspeople as one of God's elect, he has not found the rewards which Calvin said would be bestowed on the "chosen". Despite his heritage he is still a "goddam grocery clerk in a goddam wop store in a town they [his relatives] used to own" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.6).

Ethan's frustration exists on all levels. His moral tradition has directed itself largely against the three sins that David Bakan notes in The Duality of Human Existence: sex, aggression, and avarice. (15) In trying to maintain a life free from these temptations, Ethan is primarily trying to reconcile his pious actions in a world where piety only brings defeat

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(14) John Steinbeck, Winter of Our Discontent (New York, 1962), p.1. All further references to this source will be indicated by enclosure in parenthesis within the text of this paper.

(15) David Bakan, The Duality of Human Existence, (Chicago, 1966), p.35.

and where, contradictorily, evil seems to prosper and bring success. Even chance, as interpreted by Margie Young-Hunt in the tarot cards, seems to denigrate morality and to praise immoral action. Margie is introduced as a friend of Mary Hawley, Ethan's wife, but it is clear from the start that her influence on the Hawleys will be negative. Margie herself embodies all three sins. She is sexual temptation (the young cunt) for Ethan as he undergoes a significant change and converts from puritanism to the way of the world. She also fosters Ethan's latent desires for money and worldliness and promotes the greed and the aggression which must necessarily accompany them. In fact, Ethan even recognizes her as an alter-ego. "I'll bet you anything we're related. She's got pirate blood" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.7). As Steinbeck's repeated Eve/ temptress devil, Margie appears in Chapter 1 to be waiting in the wings to conquer her opposite and reassert the traditional power of evil over good.

However, as the book continues, Steinbeck makes clear that Ethan's journey of testing and temptation is only the beginning and that Margie is only one of the obstacles in his path. It is also evident, however, that Ethan has no one to share his moral vision with since his lone serious listener, beside his wife, is a red setter whose actions betray that even he is uninterested in Ethan's plight and his perception of right and wrong.

In addition, the time setting of early spring indicates

symbolically that Ethan is undergoing a change in perception as he observes his state of affairs. Just as spring struggles to overcome winter, Ethan's old values are being superceded by the new society which believes in money, success and power, rather than holy actions, such as friendliness, charity and brotherhood. Although Ethan mockingly jeers at the Easter season by quoting Biblical passages in a flippant manner, it is evident that he is at odds with a world where the "evil" of a crucifixion can be called "good" Friday. Even the landscape outside Ethan's home is described as gold-green, indicating the fine line between good and evil. The gold indicates the color of the fall and stands for death while the green symbolizes spring and potential rebirth. Spliced together they indicate the ambivalence that confronts Ethan on all sides.

As Ethan proceeds to his job, he discusses his genetic background with Joey Morphy. Ethan again emphasizes his dual heritage (Winter of Our Discontent, p.10), and his frustration that the land of the free allows a one-man Mafia like Marullo, his boss, to build a pushcart into all the prosperity he owns while Ethan, the epitome of uprightness, can barely make ends meet. By the time Ethan and Joey arrive at the store, Joey has related to Ethan the perfect plot to rob the bank. He also relates how money has become the new god of society. "Comes 9 o'clock on the nose we stand uncovered in front of the holy of holies. Then the time lock springs, and Father

Baker genuflects and opens the safe and we all bow down to the Great God currency" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.136). Here the parallel to the open tomb and the rolling away of the stone on Easter morning is also implied. Although Hawley elicits this response from Joey innocently, given Ethan's disappointment with his present situation, the reader accepts this conversation as a foreshadowing of events which may come to pass if Ethan's moral code is set aside.

The ease of such a denial of man's traditional morality is indicated by the fact that Steinbeck depicts the store as the new American church. Since wealth is worshipped, he portrays the abundance of the produce in religious terms (Winter of Our Discontent, p.14). The materialistic God demands nothing but oneness with greed. Ethan even chants mass in this new holy of holies, and again he recites the events of Christ's death on Good Friday. "'And it was about the sixth hour' -that's maybe twelve o'clock -'and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour and the sun was darkened.' Now how do I remember that? Good God, it took him a long time to die - a dreadful long time." (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 15.) Symbolically, as several critics have noted, Ethan's pure self is dying on this Good Friday. He has reached a turning point, a crisis which motivates him to deny his primitive Puritanism and to convert to the materialistic world's values. The effect of this symbolic "death" to faith is the reverse of Christ's literal death on the cross.

Christ's sacrifice is efficacious; Ethan's is selfishly motivated. Similarly, Christ dies to sin, while Ethan's sinless life dies. Several critics have noted the significance of the Easter season to the novel but very few have pointed out that the time setting is not only important as a reversal of Christ's resurrection but as a reenactment of it as well.(16) Steinbeck here has combined life and death for Ethan. For his 'life' in the world to occur, Ethan's moral nature must die and his tendency to sin be reborn. Ethan has resurrected his old self - 'the old man' of the scriptures who is evil and depraved - and has buried the new man - the resurrected image of Christ - in deliberate opposition to the advice of Scripture. (II Corinthians 4:16 and 5:17) As he mumbles to himself before opening the store, Ethan recognizes how unsure he is about the depth of his moral convictions. Quoting Luke 23:31 he says, "If they do these things in a green tree, what will be done in the dry?" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.15). Ethan is caught in what Calvin would have described as "voluntary free necessity." (17) He is both bond and free, having an inclination toward sin through his human heritage and yet a will to choose otherwise if through God's spirit he is moved to believe.

Yet, noting the Puritan heritage of Scripture embued by his Aunt Deborah, Ethan allows that the hour of his

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(16) See Jones, p. 29.

(17) Calvin, Vol. I, ch. iii, p.254.



death - the sixth hour - has not yet arrived. Instead, he continues his preparation for opening the store. Three more temptations remain before Ethan capitulates to "death." The first occurs as he is sweeping the walk when the bank president, Mr. Baker, stops for conversation. Baker urges Ethan to invest his wife's legacy from her brother, but Ethan's reaction to the suggestion reveals more of his heritage. As Ethan's past unfolds, the reader becomes aware of the motivation for his rebellion and his frustration at his so-called bad luck. He has come back from the war to enter business and has been forced to sell off real estate in order to stock the store, eventually reaching bankruptcy in less than two years as a result of his ethical actions. It is no wonder that Ethan's anger bristles at his failure and his slow descent into insolvency, while foreigners with less moral sense than he are successful. According to Baker, these men are daring risk takers; however, in Ethan's moral reality, they are nothing more than opportunists ready to use others to their unfair advantage.

Despite Baker's convincing argument, Ethan recognizes that at this point he is unwilling to risk his wife's legacy to gain more wealth. The hour of his death is still in the future, and he must endure two more temptations before closing up the store on Good Friday. However, Baker's carrot of potential success, "There's some interesting things going to happen here in New Baytown; you can be part of them" (Winter

of Our Discontent, p.19), continues to haunt him. Ethan proceeds with business as usual until Margie Young-Hunt enters the store. The second temptation, Margie, is sexually promiscuous and animal-like (Winter of Our Discontent, p.20). For her, the virtuous Ethan is a challenge, a god she might be able to seduce from his pedestal. Yet despite her suggestive words and her attempts at seduction, Ethan is able to resist - ironically by again quoting the Scripture lesson, this time the Gospel for Good Friday (Winter of Our Discontent, p.22). Ethan says:

"And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him and put His own raiment on Him and led Him away to crucify Him. And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name and him they compelled to bear His cross. And when they were come to a place called Golgotha -- that is to say, a place of the skull..."  
(Winter of Our Discontent, p. 22)

I believe Ethan's quotation of scripture here indicates his belief that using God's word will help him overcome the power of Satan. Instead of Margie's words compelling him to act, Ethan attempts to convert her to a belief in a God whose demands are foreign to her. In addition the passage also identifies Ethan as yet another Christ, one who must again suffer if he is to uphold his beliefs.

At this point Ethan still seems willing to bear his own cross, purchased at the price of a high moral code, but Margie's parting prophecy touches another side of his psyche. "You're going to be a big shot, did you know? Everything you touch will turn to gold - a leader of men..... I dare you to

live up to it and I dare you not to. So long, Saviour" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.22). Ethan's job, however, prevents him from contemplating this fascinating prophecy until noon. Following the holy day procedure, Ethan closes up shop, only to realize that the darkness of the store reflected the "darkness" of the heart "which had fallen on the world and on him" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.23). Fontenrose even notes that Ethan stays in the darkened store with shades down from 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock, paralleling Christ's time in darkness on the cross.(18) In the sixth hour - the hour of Christ's death - Ethan is experiencing the torment of his own imminent demise as a moral individual.

The ensuing conversation with his boss, Marullo, indicates how unethical practices have brought the offensive "wop" success while Ethan's ethics have produced failure. Marullo lectures about how to make money from the grocery. He advocates leaving extra foliage on vegetables, not trimming fat from meat, water logging lettuce, mislabeling grades of beef and eliminating credit to bad risks. Through all of these methods, he is following the new ethic. "You got to look out for number one." What Ethan would label dishonesty and chiseling, is, according to Marullo, only good business. "Good business is the only kind of business that stays in business" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.25).

Enraged, Ethan protests Marullo's lack of ethics and

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(18) See Fontenrose, p.134.

cites his family's own 200-year record of decency but Marullo counters with the claim that his so-called "evil" heritage is ten times as long. Marullo's strength is so convincing that Ethan is "doubtful of the realities outside himself" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.26). Although in the past he has been concerned with striving for dignity and respect, Ethan suddenly realizes that Marullo's dictum is right.

"Business is money. Money is not friendly. Kid, maybe you too friendly - too nice. Money is not nice. Money got no friends but more money. Businessmen may be friendly, nice and honorable, but only when they're not doing business. You may keep store nice," but if it's your store, you maybe go friendly broke" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.27)

Ethan's realization is so sharp that Steinbeck again stresses his feeling of darkness on the world as their conversation closes.

Shortly thereafter, Ethan is confronted in the dark store by Mr. Biggers, an agent for B.B.D.& D. wholesalers. Biggers provides yet a third and final enticement, a parallel to Christ's three temptations by Satan in the wilderness, by again flaunting the sins of greed and aggressive behavior. Ethan is invited to take the risk of deceiving Marullo and buying from Biggers, an action which will gain him 5% of the order as a kickback. Biggers jests at Ethan's honesty and his suggestions that he will turn the 5% over to Marullo. To Biggers, no sin is involved. "Who's double crossed?" he says. "He don't lose anything and you make a buck. Everybody's got a right to make a buck" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.29).

after leaving a richly constructed wallet as a type of bribe, Biggers' last words haunt Ethan. "Everybody does it," he says. "Everybody!" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.30).

When Joey Morphy appears for his lunch seconds later, he reaffirms Biggers' analysis of mankind. His reaction to the bribe is "Well, bully-bully! Prosperity at last, and it wasn't no idle promise...This is your day" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.31). Though Ethan protests that it's not honest, Morphy rationalizes the act and says he would do the same if he had the chance. "What are you hoggle-boggling about? If you were taking it away from Alfio lad, I'd say it wasn't quite straight - but you're not. You do them a favor, they do you a favor - a nice crisp green favor. Don't be crazy!" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.32). Morphy's capitulation is the last straw for Ethan, who more than ever identifies with Christ of the cross who also lamented that God had forsaken him. Isolation marks the last hours of Ethan's work day, and as he carries home his cross of heavy grocery bags and guilt at his potential capitulation to evil, Steinbeck ends the first chapter.

Chapter 2 portrays Hawley's home which sadly is no refuge from the double standard of the world. His children are engrossed in the national "I Love America" contest, but Ethan wonders if their participation is because they really love America or because they love prizes (Winter of Our Discontent, p.35). Ethan recognizes that the end results are

often confused with the means in America; consequently some evil is justified because a later good is its ultimate goal.

Ironically, though Ethan questions his children's motivations, he does not see them mirrored in his own dark self. Despite his honorable intentions, he also has hidden the fine books by the moral leaders of the past (Webster, Clay, Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson, and Twain) in the darkness of his attic and now regards them as relics of the past. Here is the first indication that the upright reputation of Ethan is based on a fictional outward appearance rather than on the reality of his actions. This makes it much easier to believe Ethan's eventual conversion to immorality since it suggests a progressive deterioration rather than a sudden, spur-of-the-moment decision.

Though he had hoped to escape the temptations of corrupt society in his home, he finds that not only his children, but his wife as well, have been infiltrated with the new values. Mary exalts in Margie Young-Hunt's prediction that Ethan "is going to be a very rich man, maybe the biggest man in the town" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.37). In addition, she persists in seeing Margie as friend rather than enemy, as victim rather than victimizer. Although Ethan protests that Margie's intentions are suspect, Mary sees money as an ultimate goal. As she says, "I don't love money. But I don't love worry either. I'd like to be able to hold up my head in this town" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.39). Mary's

conversion and willingness to see society through the eyes of the morally corrupt induce Ethan to say, "Three things will never be believed - the true, the probable and the logical" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.40). He then recognizes that his advantage as a so-called "moral" individual is that he will be less suspect or considered culpable. He can make his illegal fortune without anyone discovering his duplicity. It seems as though Ethan's demise as a moral person is complete when Mary closes the chapter by having the children turn out the light. Symbolically, evil has overcome.

The shift in narrator which occurs in Chapter 3, from third person partial omniscient to first person, has been considered a significant flaw by many Steinbeck scholars. However, I feel that this technique is similar to the shifting emphasis between the Hamiltons and the Trasks in East of Eden, and merely allows the reader to conveniently step in and out of Ethan's consciousness and to gain a different perspective of his dilemma.

Again Ethan's conscious thinking, like Steinbeck's, focuses on paradox. He fights off sleep, at the same time craving it (Winter of Our Discontent, p.41). He also analyzes the opposite reaction of his wife, Mary, who slumbers peacefully as a result of her faith, her belief, that "she will step from the living into another life as easily as she slips from sleep to wakefulness" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.41). Ethan, on the other hand, knows in his bones and his

tissue that he will stop living (Winter of Our Discontent, p.41). It is this same fear of mortality which Bakan analyzes as the source of all mankind's problems (19).

Ethan's sleeplessness provides a time for reflection, a reassessment of the events of the day. He must analyze the temptations which have confronted him and decide what action is necessary. He must also assess his Puritan background which would contend that such tribulation is salutary and should be received with a calm and grateful mind. (20) As he says, "Can man think out his life, or must he just tag along?" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.42). This paradoxical dilemma of whether man acts or is acted upon is noted by Levant.

Hawley's mixture of desire and disgust, of acquiescence and self-loathing, determines Steinbeck's formal arrangement of the novel. Hawley must act, but he must hate his action; his luck must turn but he must hate its turning. Above all, he must seem to remain passive and therefore innocent.(21)

At this point in the novel, Ethan also recounts to the reader his special place where he can feel, experience and remember. It is to this refuge he decides to go in the middle of the night in order to sort out his problem. In fact, Ethan begins to question his moral scheme and wonder if morality is not relative in a Darwinian world. (22) On his way, Hawley's subconscious again dwells on his dual heritage as he

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(19) See Bakan, Chapter 3.

(20) See Calvin, Vol. II, ch. viii, p. 23.

(21) Levant, p.294.

(22) See Garcia, p.246.



contemplates his progenitors.

They [his ancestors] successfully combined piracy and Puritanism, which aren't so unlike when you come right down to it. Both had a strong dislike for opposition, and both had a roving eye for other people's property. Where they merged they produced a hard bitten, surviving bunch of monkeys (Winter of Our Discontent, p.44).

Reflecting on his own father, Ethan assesses him as a brilliant fool. "Singlehandedly he lost the land, money, prestige and future; in fact, he lost nearly everything Allens and Hawleys had accumulated over several hundred years, lost everything but the names" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.44). Ethan then diverts his path to the direction of Porlock Street, the rich district of New Baytown, and a period of reminiscence about his own family ancestry. He particularly notes the constancy of Mary, and at the same time, reflects on the perfection of hard white frost on the lawns and sidewalk.

Symbolically, for Ethan the New Baytown of the past is the new world of America, the world of perfection envisioned by the Dutch sailors in The Great Gatsby: "the fresh green breast of the new world [which] once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams....and for the last time in history [confronted man] with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." (23) As Ethan sees it, "It is like being first in a new world, a deep satisfying sense of discovery of something clean and new, unused, undirtied"

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(23)F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p.182.

(Winter of Our Discontent, p.47). However, mankind's presence has destroyed the town's pristine appearance, just as Ethan has put the first scars on the glittering newness of the frost with his galoshes and thick socks. This is due to man's original sin which Calvin defines as "a hereditary corruption and depravity of his nature." (24) The thought of such marred perfection leads Ethan's thoughts to Danny Taylor, the town drunk. Ethan identifies Danny as a brother yet the thought of him brings raw sorrow and guilt as Ethan says, "Maybe my guilt comes because I am my brother's keeper and I have not saved him" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.48). Again, the Biblical allusion is striking and intentional. As Ethan's reverie continues, he recalls his own successful college career which is contrasted with Danny's dismal failure in the Naval Academy. Once more Steinbeck stresses Ethan as a double. Danny, a ruined man, both physically and mentally, signifies the results of moral corruption on a "good" man and prefigures Ethan's own fate. As Ethan notes, he "might meet him any place" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.49), even in himself.

Ethan continues to head for his Place, "a little passage about four feet wide and five feet deep" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.50). Ironically, unlike Christ, whose entry into the tomb on Good Friday signified a conquering of sin, death and Satan, Ethan's entry into the cave begins a

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(24) See Calvin, Vol. I, ch. i, p. 217.

subsequent moral decline.(25) He confesses "that he is drawn there by big changes (Winter of Our Discontent, p.51), and it is here he undertakes self-analysis, describing his "need for a quiet secret place where soul-shivers can abate, where man is one and take stock of it" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.52). Instead of examining his soul, however, Ethan takes stock of his situation, his family, his desire for money. Could Biggers, Margie, Joey, and Baker incline him "to a business cleverness I never had, to acquisitiveness foreign to me? Could I incline to want what I didn't want?" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.54).

Moral ambiguity surfaces once again as Ethan questions "Are the eaters more immoral than the eaten? In the end all are eaten - all - gobbled up by the earth, even the fiercest and most crafty" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.54). For the first time in his life, his introspection leads him to move away from orthodoxy and to espouse the new doctrine of greed which has been growing in America even since the first settlers arrived.(26) Ethan then recalls his great-grandfather's account of how his own ship was burned at anchor, and suggests that the crime was intentional rather than accidental. Thus, he argues that even in the ideal past the desire for money, insurance, had caused individuals to sell out. Remembering a past conversation with his

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(25)Garcia, p.249.

(26)Garcia, p.250.

grandfather, Ethan recalls when Captain Hawley warned him that morality must be retained on an individual basis, "only the single man alone - only in one man alone. There's the only power - one man alone. Can't depend on anything else." (Winter of Our Discontent, p.55).

The reverie stops abruptly with Ethan's recognition of the time. As he hurries home, however, he confronts Danny Taylor, searching for enough money to dull his sense of failure by using alcohol. Ethan's moral sense is still motivated by Danny and he confronts him vocally, "Danny, you've got to stop this. Think I've forgotten? You were my brother, Danny. You still are. I'll do anything in the world to help you" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.56). However, Danny resists Ethan's preaching by asserting his own superiority. Though a drunk, he is still better off than Ethan; he is not a clerk. Thus, even in his closest relationship, possessions and social stature appear to block Ethan's ethical concerns.

Ethan returns home and tests his theory that whatever is true and logical won't be believed. He also resumes his facade of silly actions and flippant comments as a way to deal with his inner turmoil. Mary's reaction to Ethan's truth is, in fact, disbelief, and ironically, she is comforted by the facade of silliness. She says, "I'm glad you're silly again. It's awful when you're gloomy" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.58). Yet the gloominess persists inwardly - only further evidence of man's duality - the inseparable paradox of being

depraved and elect, good and bad, simultaneously.

Chapter 4 concentrates on Holy Saturday - the only day in the world's days when Jesus is dead. As Ethan's Aunt Deborah notes, "And all men and women are dead too. Jesus is in hell. But tomorrow. Just wait till tomorrow. Then you'll see something" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.60). Despite his despair, Ethan still retains a minute comfort in his Aunt Deborah's faith. For her, Easter "wasn't two thousand years ago....it was now. Something going on, happening eternally, but always exciting and new" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.60). Although he recognizes that Aunt Deborah has planted something of her faith in him, Ethan's reaction is to refuse to listen, to get away from her influence. Consequently he heads for the store and his insignificant tasks a half hour earlier than necessary. On the way, he has a chance meeting with Stoney Smith, the town constable, and the topic of bank robbery again surfaces. Seemingly Ethan is now considering both an open and a covert evil in order to attain his monetary and materialistic goals.

After discussing the power of money with Joey Morphy, Ethan again soliloquizes with the canned goods, relying on them not to argue and not to repeat. Again he emphasizes man's duality and the complexity of moral decisions. "If it's that simple, why don't more people do it? [i.e. cheat] If the laws of thinking are the laws of things, then morals are relative, too, and manner and sin - that's relative, too, in a

relative universe. Has to be" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.65). During this one-sided conversation, Ethan begins to recognize that his heritage is not as pure as he had boasted.

My ancestors, those highly revered ship owners and captains, surely had commissions to raid commerce in the Revolution and again in 1812. Very patriotic and virtuous. But to the Dutch they were pirates and what they took, they kept (Winter of Our Discontent, p.65).

He also realizes that the Hawley family fortune, like that of the Trasks and Cathy in East of Eden, has been developed by sin and greed rather than by admirable actions. The sins of the fathers had then been visited on the children to the third and fourth generations. Despite the illegal means used to attain it, Ethan's money has grown respectable since he has kept it for a while. This is true of other family dynasties, as well. Their fortunes were acquired by betrayal and deception, for "Where money is concerned, the ordinary rules of conduct take a holiday" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.66).

With this new self-perception, Ethan's eyes are opened to the world around him. Especially seen in a new light is Margie Young-Hunt, whose sexual appeal seems even more obvious to Ethan. His response to Baker also indicates Ethan's decision that it's time for a change. As Margie notes, "You don't seem like the same man" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.70). Ethan himself reveals, "But two things did happen that proved to me at least that some deep-down underwater change was going on in me. I mean that yesterday, or any yesterday before that, I wouldn't have done what I did...I guess I had

unrolled a new pattern" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.71).

This new pattern is revealed when Marullo steps in the store, and Ethan suggests he take a vacation for a short time, a return to Sicily. Although he appears outwardly sympathetic to his boss's arthritic condition and age, Ethan's real motive is to search out whether Marullo is a legitimate citizen or an illegal alien. When Biggers returns, Ethan also surprises him by returning the twenty dollar bribe found in the wallet and by saying, "The bids aren't all in" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.73). Taking Joey Morphy's advice "Never take the first offer" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.64), Ethan tries to up the ante and to force Biggers into a bigger and better proposal. The result is Biggers' respect, even though Ethan has been transformed from a Christ to a Judas. Ethan, like Iscariot, "will not sell his master (ironically his better self), short" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.73). Having made the decision to really become a man in a worldly sense, Ethan closes the shop determined to run his life differently.

On arriving home, Ethan has to prepare for dinner with Margie Young-Hunt, and a long discussion with Mary ensues over whether a "dark" suit isn't more appropriate for her visit. Ethan's evil intentions are indicated here and are reinforced later in his new attitude toward his business. Upon discovering that his wife has prepared a chicken from a chain store rather than his own grocery, Ethan decides not to cause any friction or argument. The new Ethan Allen Hawley will go

along with the national follies and use them when he can.

Steinbeck's portrayal of the moral ambiguity of Ethan is given further depth by his son Allen asking to use his Knight Templar sword. Here Steinbeck once again stresses his fascination with King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and ironically associates Ethan with Lancelot, who betrays a human rather than an almighty king. When Ethan finishes bathing, he emerges to find his son Allen dressed as a knight. However, the knight's hat, complete with plume, has yellowed, indicating the moral decay of its owner. Allen challenges Ethan to return to the attic and to look at the books stored there. Consequently, Ethan reflects on his childhood and the books he loved, which are now merely waiting to be rediscovered. He mentions Dore's illustrations of Dante's Divine Comedy, the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and Grimm, and the majesty of Morte D'Arthur.

In analyzing his own attraction to these works, Ethan, as a stand-in for Steinbeck, reveals what he considers to be good writing. Ultimately here is what critics must judge Steinbeck's success by, not their own predilections. Ethan says,

A man who tells secrets or stories must think of who is hearing or reading, for a story has as many versions as it has readers. Everyone takes what he wants or can from it, and thus changes it to his measure. Some pick up parts and reject the rest, some strain the story through their mesh of prejudice, some paint it with their own delight. [But] a story must have some points of contact with the reader to make him feel at home in it (Winter of Our Discontent, p.80).



Obviously Steinbeck still believes in his non-teleological method to some extent, since this quote indicates that the writer should not limit his work so much that it ceases to appeal to different people on different levels. However, the fault Steinbeck seems to have found with this method is revealed in the next paragraph of the novel. In fact, here Steinbeck seems to say that the teleological question "Why?" is more important than the basic non-teleological facts "What happened?"

For Ethan as well as Steinbeck, great books and great individuals had kept the "light" shining. Yet, as Ethan acknowledges

Most of us are the wards of that nineteenth century science which denied existence to anything it could not measure or explain. The things we couldn't explain went right on but surely not with your blessing. We did not see what we couldn't explain, and meanwhile a great part of the world was abandoned to children, insane people, fools, and mystics, who were more interested in what is than in why it is.

Allen, however, despite the joy of his father in books, misses the point of the "giants on the earth." All he observes are the pots of gold and silk dresses (Winter of Our Discontent, p.81). As the conversation continues, Allen educates his father on the new America rather than Ethan revealing the positives about the past. According to Allen, the genteel piracy of the early Hawleys has only been refined. Even though piracy is out, the impulse lingers: people want something for nothing, wealth without effort (Winter of Our

discontent, p.82). Ethical considerations are wiped away. As Allen says, "It's all dough, no matter how you get it." Surprisingly, Ethan's reply still defends honor and morality despite his own defection from the cause. He says, "I don't believe that. It doesn't hurt the money to get it that way, but it hurts the one who gets it" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.82). Representing a new generation of greed, Allen counters, "I don't see how. It's not against the law. Why, some of the biggest people in this country..." (Winter of Our Discontent, p.82). Here of course he echoes Biggers' earlier comment that everybody is involved to some extent in corruption. Interestingly, Steinbeck again incorporates his preoccupation with Cain/Abel imagery in Winter of Our Discontent as Ethan replies to his son, calling him first Charles and then Allen. Suddenly Ethan has acknowledged the duality of Cain/Abel in his offspring. Sadly, however, he does not see the parallels in his own life. Although Allen's duality mirrors his own disillusionment, the boy's dilemma only sickens Ethan; it does not arouse recognition of his own dilemmas. By calling Allen "Charles", Ethan admits the evil that runs through him, the dual heritage of man. For although Allen has admirable goals like happiness, satisfaction and success, to him the price he pays to obtain them is inconsequential. He is willing to sacrifice any principle to attain his goal.

Ironically, Ethan is heading the same direction as his

son; he is developing a similar willingness to capitulate to evil in order to attain what society values. Ethan's other child, Ellen, also is interested in wealth, indicating the shifting values of the younger generation. At one point, she urges her father to hurry up because she's sick of being poor (Winter of Our Discontent, p.85). At this point, Ethan notes the ambiguity of his feelings for her, by saying, "I do love her and that's odd because she is everything I detest in anyone else - and I adore her" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.85).

By the time Margie Young-Hunt arrives for dinner, the Hawleys are prepared to play the game of entertaining with its duplicity of compliments and attempts to impress. After the meal, Mary mentions that Margie's forecast of Ethan's future has changed his life. Ethan's reaction to the statement is almost a physical illness. His change is more like possession by the devil - to him it seems

the seething birth of something foreign with every nerve resisting and losing the fight and settling back to make peace with the invader. Violation - that's the word, if you can think of the sound of a word edged with blue flame like a blow torch (Winter of Our Discontent, p.88).

The conversation revolves to Ethan's fortune and a re-reading of the tarot cards. Margie even reveals that her great-grandmother was sentenced to Alaska for witchcraft (Winter of Our Discontent, p.91). The theme of moral ambiguity is again stressed in the cards that appear. For

example, the card which symbolizes Ethan's future is the man hanged upside down "la pendu," again a reversal of the Christ image. While Ethan interprets the card negatively - "so much for my future" - Margie contends "it can mean salvation" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.94).

Margie's relation of the story of the snake also mirrors Ethan's dilemma, torn between old and new, the good and the bad. She says,

"Once when I was a little girl I saw a snake change its skin, a Rocky Mountain rattler. I watched the whole thing. Well, looking at the cards, they disappeared and I saw that snake changing its skin, part dusty and ragged and part fresh and new" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.95).

This vision, mirroring a death/resurrection image which will shortly occur in the physical year as well, scares Margie so that she changes her plans for Easter. She will go to Montauk rather than to church. The snake, no doubt a symbol for the new Ethan Margie has seen developing, is still another symbol of duality. Is Ethan's future bleak as the fate of the snake in the Garden of Eden or will it be positive and renewed as his regenerated skin creates a new creature? Ironically Steinbeck suggests that both possibilities exist at the same time.

Later, as Ethan reassesses his decision about growing rich, he feels that instinct causes man to make decisions rather than virtuous pondering. Using an image reminiscent of East of Eden, he says, "It's as though, in the dark and desolate caves of the mind, a faceless jury has met and

decided" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.98). Ethan feels that at times evil rises from the water that usually spawns good. He describes it in this way:

"This secret and sleepless area in me I have always thought of as black, deep, waveless water, a spawning place from which only a few forms ever rise to the surface. Or maybe it's a great library where is recorded everything that has ever happened to living matter, back to the first moment when it began to live (Winter of Our Discontent, p.98).

He then relates his feelings at the death of Mary's brother, Dennis. As Dennis changed to violent, terrified and fierce, his kindly Irish horse face grew bestial. Similarly, Ethan too experienced a change as he watched him die.

A monster swam up out of my dark water. I hated him. I wanted to kill him, to bite out his throat. My jaw muscles tightened, and I think my lips flaired back like a wolf's at the kill. (Winter of Our Discontent, p.99).

Although Ethan is assured by old Doc Peele that such a reaction is not unusual, he does attribute it to man's former animalistic state - "Maybe a return to the time of the pack when a sick or hurt member was a danger. Some animals and most fish tear down and eat a weakened brother (Winter of Our Discontent, p.99). In fact, man's ambiguous moral sense grows out of Ethan's so-called Congress of the Dark, and it often works overtime to produce paradox.

Sometimes a man seems to revere himself so that you would say "He can't do that. It's out of character." Maybe it's not. It could be just another angle or it might be the pressures above or below have changed his shape (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 99).

As Ethan notes

I think I believe that a man is changing all the time. But there are certain moments when the change becomes noticeable...Recently many little things had begun to form a pattern of larger things. It's as though events and experiences nudged and jostled me in a direction contrary to my normal one or the one I had come to believe was normal,... the failure, the man without real hope and drive, barred in by responsibilities...caged by habits and attitudes I thought of as being moral even virtuous. And it may be that I had a smugness about being what I called a "Good Man" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 100).

Although the darkness completes its victory at this point, Ethan does become more aware of its constant latent existence within him as he reflects on all the frauds and cheats that surround him. Although he was unconscious to their attempts to pervert him, Ethan now recognizes that all his so-called opposites "had been nudging me in a concentration and altogether it amounted to a push" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.100). Although Ethan claims he is going to think out the alternatives, he finds that "the dark jury of the deep had already decided for me" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 101).

Ethan also discovers that even his devotion to Danny Taylor and the guilt he feels can be blocked out if he tries hard enough. It is all a matter of reverse psychology. Instead of shoving his guilt out of his head, he welcomes it. The result is "Pretty soon it'll get tired, and pieces of it will go and before long the whole thing will go" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.103). Finally, Ethan tries to come to terms with the structure of his change. Scapegoating, he attributes his new self to "feeling pressures from without, Mary's wish, Allen's desires, Ellen's anger, Mr. Baker's help" (Winter of

Our Discontent, p. 104), and he feels that all of New Baytown is involved in a similar sellout of morality. Granted, they were small violations, but still the founding fathers had

abolished part of the Decalogue and kept the rest. And when one of the successful men had what he needed or wanted, he reassumed his virtue as easily as changing a shift and for all one could see, he took no hurt from his derelictions, always assuming he didn't get caught (Winter of Our Discontent, p.104-105).

Ethan speculates if such small crimes can be condoned why not larger ones. Perhaps all the rules could be abolished. Yet Ethan realizes that "if I should put rules aside for a time, I know I would wear scars but would they be worse than the scars of failure I am wearing" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.105). Like a ship charting a new course, Ethan fears his decision to adapt to worldliness, to choose his dark side. He says, 'All right, I know now where I want to go. How do I get there and where are lurking rocks and what will the weather be" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.106)? Yet he also recognizes the foolhardiness of trying to find out if his course is good. As his grandfather, the old captain, wisely knows, "what's good for one is bad for another and you won't know till after" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.106).

Chapter V of Winter of Our Discontent centers on the events of Easter Sunday and Ethan's meeting with Mr. Baker to discuss Mary's investment of her brother's money. But before breakfast, Ethan is confronted by his boss. Marullo has somehow heard the rumor of Ethan's treatment of Mr. Biggers

and that Ethan has refused the kickback. Awed by what he considers Ethan's superior morality and unaware that Ethan has really tried to up the ante from Biggers, Marullo has brought a present to express his admiration, chocolate Easter eggs. Ethan marvels at the change in Marullo, but conversely, his own guilt at his duplicity is overwhelming. Although he jokingly announces "Christ is arisen, All's right with the world" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.111), it is obvious that Ethan as a type of Christ is still suffering. This is even more evident when, in a facetious manner, Hawley flippantly announces that his Easter hat is a "simple off-the-face crown of thorns in gold with real ruby droplets on the forehead" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.112).

Once again religious memories engulf Ethan as he reflects on his youthful experiences in church. Especially significant is his perception after the cross falls on the bishop while Ethan is serving as crucifer. "The incident seemed to prove to me that intentions, good or bad, are not enough. There's luck or fate or something else that takes over accidents" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.113). While leaving the church on Easter, Mary too questions Ethan's faith, stating "sometimes I wonder if you believe" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.114). Ethan's reply indicates that he is not entirely devoid of faith at this point.

If my mind and soul and body were as dry of faith as a navy bean, the words "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" would



still make my stomach turn over and put a flutter in my chest and light a fire in my brain (Winter of Our Discontent, p.115).

He accounts for this by his upbringing; his faith had been imbued in him as a youngster and therefore would always influence his adulthood.

Let's say that when I was a little baby, and all my bones soft and malleable, I was put in a small Episcopal cruciform box and so took my shape. Then, when I broke out of the box, the way a baby chick escapes an egg, is it strange that I had the shape of a cross (Winter of Our Discontent, p.115).

Suddenly Ethan recognizes that his new self may not really cause much of a change even though he will be rich. Money, he observes, does not change the sickness, only the symptoms. The essential dilemma, man's duality, will still continue to frustrate him. As Richard C. Bedford points out in his essay, "The Genesis and Consolation of Our Discontent", the essential dilemma portrayed in the novel is that

despite man's innate reasoning ability--product of his mortality and consequently time-bound, finite view--he actually cannot know the consequences of his choices. That is, although each follows his reason in his pursuit of good, none can really know the true direction. Thus, any choice may be as right or as wrong as another, although we as mortal, human beings evaluate it in hindsight according to what we can only assume are its consequences.(27)

Ethan now proceeds to equate his new self with his former action in the war. Here, too, he became what was required of him.

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(27)Richard C. Bedford, "The Genesis and Consolation of Our Discontent," Criticism, XIV (1972), 284.

No man on earth ever had less murder in his heart than I. But they made another box and crammed me in it. The times, the moment, demanded that I slaughter human beings and I did (Winter of Our Discontent, p.116).

At this point events begin to fall in place according to Ethan's immoral thoughts. Marullo, heartened by Ethan's uprightness with Mr. Biggers, begins to seriously contemplate a trip to Italy, all according to Ethan's plan. In reality the plan is more of a plot that Ethan has put together but which the unsuspecting citizens of New Baytown will hardly give him credit for. The reader is also made aware that the plot somehow involves Danny Taylor as well, a fact which Steinbeck foreshadows by Ethan's daymare in which he envisions Danny dying - melting and running down over his frame (Winter of Our Discontent, p.118).

Awakened by the Bakers' arrival for Easter dinner, Ethan continues to contemplate the new power of money. Without money, gentry gradually cease to be gentry. In fact, money is so necessary that mankind, even the most moral, believe they can't survive without it. Ethan speculates, "Perhaps that was the reason why the change was taking place in me. Money is necessary to keep my place in a category I am used to and comfortable in" (Winter of Our Discontent, pp.118-119).

During the trivial conversation that follows, Ethan brings up his daymare about Danny and asserts once again his deep-seated obligation to be his brother's keeper (Winter of Our Discontent, p.121). He even suggests that if Danny were

given a decent amount of money he might get well. The Bakers and Mary disagree, suggesting that if Danny were indeed given a large amount of money, "he'd probably drink himself to death" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.121). After this conversation Mr. Baker slowly but surely arrives at the purpose of his visit; however, Ethan senses his motives are not what they appear and his heart hardens against his selfless benefactor. (Winter of Our Discontent, p.122). When Baker proposes that they discuss business without Mary, who generally functions as Ethan's conscience, Ethan knows his suspicions about Baker's "evil" side are correct. In fact, once she is gone, Baker is quick to suggest Ethan's complicity in a plot to buy into and eventually control future money-making endeavors in New Baytown and to oust the town's present administration.

Ethan plays innocent and naive to Baker's suggestion, but he is aware that Baker's speculation revolves around an airport. The conversation ends with Baker's encouragement that if Ethan "can raise some capital, I'll see that you get in on the ground floor" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.127). When discussing the proposal with Mary, however, Ethan seems doubly aware of the paradox of wealth: The more you have, the less enough it is (Winter of Our Discontent, p.128). He cites overproduction as a basic instinct in all animals, and he worries about "the despairing unhappiness, the panic money brings, the protectiveness and the envy" (Winter of Our

Discontent, p.129). Perhaps Steinbeck is mirroring his own concerns in Ethan's plight, for he, too, greatly feared that his art would be corrupted by his monetary success. Mary again perceives Ethan's worries as a bluff; he is not really serious about wealth. Ethan, however, knows his potential and recognizes that the only problem he faces is how he obtains the fortune. "That's the worry," he says (Winter of Our Discontent, p.129), for it will require an abdication of the values which have so long been a part of him.

In the later afternoon of Easter Sunday, Ethan's moral dilemma continues as he relates the story of how he killed two rabbits who were destroying Mary's carnation bed. He attributes his miserable feeling after the event to the fact that he was unused to killing. Filled with rabbit misery, Ethan goes to see Danny Taylor, trying to restore a balance by creating life, just as he had earlier destroyed it. Ironically, however, his ability to kill the rabbits foreshadows his ability to plot Danny's destruction as well.(28)

Thus Ethan tells Danny he wants to help him but Danny's reply is "You know better than that" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.131). Ethan's motives are even suspect by his best friend. As the conversation continues, Ethan discovers Baker has already been to see Danny and has tried to buy the

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(28) See Levant, p.296.

meadow property from him for an airfield. Spurred on by Ethan's conversation on Easter Sunday, Baker has also brought along fine liquor as a bribe. After relating Baker's ploy, Danny suggests Ethan's motive is similar and that he is just going about it in a polite way. Danny is determined to keep the property until Ethan explains how the virtuous city bigwigs would find a way to institutionalize him for his own good and to rule him incompetent to manage his property. A guardian, no doubt Baker's bank, would be appointed to manage Danny's estate, and the property would be sold to Baker anyhow.

Ethan then generously offers Mary's legacy to Danny in order to affect a cure. Although Danny warns him not to trust a drunk and that he will never get it back, Ethan is still adamant about his desire to help. In a reversal of Richard III, where the drunk Clarence in no way suspects his brother, Richard, of plotting his death, Danny sees through Ethan's righteous offer.

This isn't chess, it's poker. I used to be pretty good at poker - too good. You're betting I'll put up my meadow as collateral. And you're betting that a thousand dollars' worth of booze will kill me, and there you'll be with an airport in your lap (Winter of Our Discontent, p.136).

As Ethan returns home, he again feels the cold, hurting misery in his stomach, but it is hardly the death of the innocent rabbits that bothers him this time. As usual, he relies on his wife to ease his ill feeling. He also informs

her that he will need \$1000 of her legacy, but he wisely does not tell her why or what he will use it for. Later, while waiting for sleep, he acknowledges his own depravity and denies his willingness to choose the good even if he could.

I inquired of myself concerning what they used to call matters of conscience and I could find no wound. I asked whether, having set my course, I could change direction or even reverse the compass ninety degrees and I thought I could but I didn't want to (Winter of Our Discontent, p.139).

In addition, Ethan feels that he has the ability now to challenge and beat even the most depraved individuals like Marullo and Margie at their own game.

As Ethan is thinking and planning he notices his daughter, Ellen, sleepwalking. Her destination is a cabinet, the holy of Hawleys, which contains, according to Ethan, only worthless family treasures. Yet here also is the magic of the family - a translucent stone 4" in diameter. Somehow, it provides sustenance to the Hawleys and changes its "color and convolutions and texture changed as my needs changed" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.143). As Ellen touches the stone, Ethan again recognizes its power for good.(29) Again using light and dark imagery, Steinbeck emphasizes the stone's positive effect in his life. "It did seem true that a glow came from my daughter, Ellen, not only from the white of her gown but from her skin as well. I could see her face and I should not have been able to in the darkened room" (Winter of Our Discontent,

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(29)See Todd Lieber, "Talismanic Patterns in the Novels of John Steinbeck," American Literature, XLIV (1972), 250-269.

p.144). After a while, Ellen returns the stone to the cabinet, and she loses the luminescence. When she returns to bed she is comforted and peaceful. Perhaps, speculates Ethan, it brings her close to the real Hawley.

Despite the talisman incident, which should motivate a positive moral choice, Ethan awakes on Easter Monday determined to pursue success and money. Meeting with Jerry Morphy at breakfast, he accidentally discovers that Marullo may be an illegal alien. Again it is Ethan's innocent unconcerned manner that draws out the information rather than his insistent questioning. Thus, moral ambiguity is again present as Ethan's good nature is essential in providing him with facts he can use to create evil for Marullo.

After breakfast, Ethan proceeds to take his Knights Templar hat to be whitened. Symbolically, the hat stands for Ethan's tarnished reputation. However, it also represents the heritage of sin and Mr. Baker's ancestors, the early patriarchs who settled in America. His next stop is, of course, Marullo's store, now seen in an entirely new and greedy perspective. As Ethan says

Inside, the store looked changed and new to me. I saw things I had never seen before and didn't see things that had worried and irritated me. And why not? Bring new eyes to a world or even new lenses, and presto, new world (Winter of Our Discontent, p.150).

As he prepares to open the store, Ethan reflects on the possibility of robbing Mr. Baker's bank. After all, he has some solid tips from Morphy and has just learned of the

inefficiency of the lock on the back door. Thinking to himself, Ethan reiterates Steinbeck's moral purpose.

Is there anyone who has not wondered about the decisions and acts of the mighty of the earth? Are they born in reasoning and dictated by virtue or can some of them be the products of accidents, of daydreaming, of imagining of the stories we tell ourselves (Winter of Our Discontent, p.151).

I believe that in this passage Steinbeck is virtually admitting that the difference between good and evil is ultimately unpredictable and incomprehensible. Of course this concept also permeates Steinbeck's early work and seems to echo the thoughts of Robert Burns, whose line from "To A Mouse" provided the title for Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. "The best laid plans 'o mice 'an men/ Gang aft a'glee/ 'An leive us naught but grief 'an pain/ for promised joy."

Ethan then proceeds to mentally enact the steps necessary to carry out the robbery. However, a few minutes later, he discovers that Danny has produced a legal document - no doubt a will from which Ethan will benefit as he had planned. But the taste of success is not pleasant. As Ethan says, "I felt lousy. Maybe the first time is always hard" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.154). In the sin-sick world, Ethan realizes, "if a man hears you have been honest, he probes for the dishonesty that prompted it" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.154). No one trusts the man with an upright value system; there must be an ulterior motive (an evil) that prompts a desire to do good.



When Marullo finally arrives, Ethan questions him about the date of his immigration, but the most significant part of their conversation involves Ethan's moral sense. Marullo notes that "you never took none of the petty cash and you never took nothing home without you wrote it down," and Ethan replies quite openly, "Honesty is a racket with me" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.159). Marullo is impressed by the fact that Ethan never steals, but he fails to see the truth when Ethan hints that "Maybe I'm waiting to steal the whole thing" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.159). Moral ambiguity is again evident for Ethan, who recognizes, "When I'm most honest, nobody believes me. I tell you, Alfio, to conceal your motives, tell the truth" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.159). Suddenly Marullo's admiration for Ethan's virtues produces a surprising offer of a partnership. Though Ethan protests he does not have any money to invest, Marullo encourages him to get it by taking Mr. Biggers' bribe and by holding out for 6% instead of 5% as a kickback. Good will be obtained through evil.

Still maintaining the facade of respectability, Ethan tricks both Marullo and Mr. Baker. Marullo still believes in Ethan's moral uprightness, and Baker is taken in when Ethan weakly explains his wife's withdrawal of \$1000 from the bank. Feigning that the money was used for furniture, Ethan knows that it is an investment with much larger returns - an investment that may end in Danny Taylor's death but will

certainly bring Ethan money on top of money. Ironically, Baker's concern is that the \$1000 will not be a sure-fire investment and that Ethan does not possess the killer-instinct so necessary in today's monetary conscious society; however, in typical Steinbeck duality, just the opposite is true.

Symbolically, as Ethan delivers the \$1000 to Danny's lean-to shack near the harbor, he passes the dredger, "its giant screw augering up mud and shells" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.165). The black residue is similar to the evil that Ethan has unearthed in himself - has drawn to the surface and distributed among society. Yet the smell of the dredging process is described by Ethan as strangely ambiguous. "It brought from the dredger the stink of mud and long-dead shells and tarnished weed together with the sweet smell of baking cinammon in apple pie" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.165). The description is reminiscent of the "ngkapy" of East of Eden. This liquor has a sweet yet bitter taste which parallels the positive and negative smells described here. Signs of renewal as well as degradation seem to be intermingled at this point in the novel, suggesting that Ethan's change for the worse is at least not irreversible.

At home, Ethan is confronted by his children who are hard at work on their "I love America" contest entries. Surprisingly, considering his actions with Danny, he still presents a moral stance when his daughter questions him about borrowing other people's words for an essay. If the proper

recognition isn't given, says Ethan, "then it would be stealing like any other kind of stealing" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.168). Ironically, though, such a moral stance is not taken in Ethan's own life, even though Mary seems to consistently expose him to light and beauty in an effort to counteract the dark forces warring within him.

As he enjoys supper with Margie Young-Hunt and Mr. Hartog, the stark realization of his actions hits him. He sees a distorted Danny through his glass at the restaurant and envisions running after him and warning him that his gift was poison. With tears in his eyes at his betrayal of his brother, Ethan drowns his sorrow with drink. Yet he knows what he has done - he has planted the seeds of another's destruction for his own benefit. Again he poses to himself the possibility that "Maybe it's only the first time that's miserable" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.173). Then he recognizes the hard facts of society. "It has to be faced. In business and in politics a man must carve and maul his way through men to get to be King of the Mountain. Once there, he can be great and kind--but he must get there first" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.173).

Chapter X moves Winter of Our Discontent to Easter Tuesday and portrays Ethan's continuing revulsion for moral betrayal on a higher level despite his conversion on a lower one. Here Steinbeck's didacticism on morality is more apparent as he upbraids society for the evils of a cold war

which is repulsive to him. Ethan awakens "with a sad sick feeling as though my soul had an ulcer" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.174). He speculates that, like the early Campbellites, man would feel cheated if he did not bring about his own destruction. Eventually mankind must realize that all the progress and success in the world will never cure anger or discontent. Paradoxically, it is intermingled with all of mankind's goals and thus prevents absolute satisfaction.

When he arrives<sup>at</sup> at work, Ethan finds copies of Danny's will and a promissory note stuck under his door. Depressed, yet exultant, Ethan destroys Danny's note which stated, "Eth, this is what you want" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.177), and attempts to cover his feeling of guilt by literally cleaning house. In addition, he chases away the symbolical cat, who like the human species, has been constantly attempting to prey on the Hawley stock. As Part I of the novel ends, Ethan's moral corruption is complete even though he tries to conceal it by his fastidious keeping of the store. The literary allusion of the title is repeated by Ethan to show that, like Richard, he has caused his own fortunes to change from bad to good through his own duplicity.

Part II of the novel returns to third person narration and Chapters XI and XII parallel the first two chapters in an attempt to form an objective rather than a subjective picture. Again Steinbeck presents a wide angle picture of New Baytown before narrowing his focus to Ethan. The time has shifted to

June and the narrator notes that it is a time of germination. Similarly, the seed sown by Ethan is about to bring fruit. The narrator stresses that morally the residents of New Baytown had slept for a long time and that their ways were set. Steinbeck as narrator relates:

The Town Manager sold equipment to the township, and the judges fixed traffic tickets as they had for so long that they did not remember it as illegal practice--at least the books said it was. Being normal men, they surely did not consider it immoral. All men are moral. Only their neighbors are not (Winter of Our Discontent, p.184).

However, Ethan's practices are not so deterministically set.

Ethan, in talking with Jerry Morphy, is still attempting to understand the strange mixture that he sees in others, especially Marullo. The Italian has, according to Morphy, a variety of contrasts, all of which combine to make him rich. However, it is carefully all on the level. Morphy subtly suggests that Ethan needs to take such risks.

Failure is a state of mind. It's like one of those sand traps an ant lion digs. You keep sliding back. Takes one hell of a jump to get out of it. You've got to make that jump, Eth. Once you get out, you'll find success is a state of mind too" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.186).

Even if someone is hurt in the process, according to Morphy, "That's life." His code is "Grab anything that goes by. It may not come around again....Grab the gold ring for a free ride" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.187). He suggests to follow Satchell Paige's advice to not "look behind, someone might be gaining on you." After the talk, Ethan decides to call the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Though the

call is not completed or recorded in the book, the reader realizes that Ethan's new morality has selected another victim and that Marullo's status as a probable illegal alien will also be exploited by an upstanding Mr. Hawley.

Yet Ethan's double standard is still evident when he confronts his children. He still expects them to see the value of work and to utilize it to gain success. But Allen, a new generation, is set in his determination to get rich quick. He contemplates the fortune earned by a 13-year-old on a "rigged" quiz show and decides that the moral aspects don't bother him (Winter of Our Discontent, p.190).

He has learned quicker than his father that everybody does it and that despite the risks involved, the potential rewards are worth it. Although Ethan questions Allen's ability to "honestly love a dishonest thing" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.190), he again fails to see his own flaw. Since his end or goal is so admirable, his own dishonesty and duplicity can be ignored or even justified. Though he himself would reap unworked for gain, Ethan expects his son to use the work-ethic to attain hoped for fortune. He will find him a job in the store and, ironically, even that will be illegal under child-labor laws. Ellen, on the other hand, has immersed herself in the values of the past, morality embodied in the speeches of Henry Clay. She reaffirms to her father the greatness and goodness of his heritage just as Ethan had earlier tried to transmit these values to Allen. Ironically,

she is Ethan's teacher in restoring his hope for resurrection.

Chapter XII continues the third person narration by focusing on Margie Young-Hunt. Ironically, her promiscuity had provided her with strength because it was an acknowledgement of others' secret existence and it was the "one warm honesty to which she could retire to restore herself" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.195). Despite her vices, she is also a positive force in the lives of her lovers, since she is a receptive, unjudging and silent listener whom men could talk to freely and without fear.

The narrator reveals that Margie's original interest in Ethan was to free him from a socio-economic bind which had robbed him of strength and security. But the new man frightens her.

The mouse was growing a lion's mane. She saw the muscles under his clothes, felt ruthlessness growing behind his eyes. So must the gentle Einstein have felt when his dreamed concept of nature of matter flashed over Hiroshima (Winter of Our Discontent, p.196).

She realized that, like the Bakers of the world, Ethan could always "raise a moral reason for doing what (he) wanted to do anyway" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.201), but even so she is somewhat surprised when she finds a federal man talking to Ethan. Though Ethan feigns a lack of knowledge of the investigator's intent, Margie senses his duplicity. She thought, "He's pretending to be a simpleton. I wonder what the guy really wanted" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.202). In turn, Ethan senses her lack of acceptance and repeats again,

"You know, Margie, no one ever believes the true" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.203), but Margie is too quick for him. Her reply indicates her knowledge that even truth can have two sides and be ambiguous. "The whole truth! When you carve a chicken, Eth, it's all chicken but some is dark meat and some white" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.203).

After their initial small talk, Margie openly tries to seduce Ethan and to gain a part of his coming good fortune. Margie has finally understood the significance of Eth's Good Friday conversation in which he called her a daughter of Jerusalem. In typical moral ambiguity, she finds it pretty wonderful and scary (Winter of Our Discontent, p.203). Finally Ethan flippantly goes along with Margie, but eventually he falls back on Mary as a savior from temptation. Using the words from the Catholic "Hail Mary" to invoke his wife as mediator, he again combines evil and good in a paradoxical manner. "Mary of my heart," he says, "look on your husband, your lover, your dear friend. Guard me against evil from within me and from harm without. I pray for your help, my Mary, for a man has a strange and wind-troubled need and the ache of the ages is on him to spread his seeds everywhere. Ora pro me." (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 204.) The tone of this passage suggests at first insincerity but again its very usage implies that Ethan still is struggling, albeit weakly to avoid evil and choose good. Ultimately their conversation is broken by Mr. Baker's entrance to the store.



The reader again sees Ethan's ploy of innocent naivete as Baker questions about Danny Taylor and Marullo. This encounter also helps Ethan to discover that he is not the only Judas who is using betrayal to his advantage. Baker, too, has plotted to expose evil - but his acts are not motivated by good. He has fallen into the trap of trying to make the ends justify the means. As Thomas a'Becket says in Murder in the Cathedral, "The last temptation is the greatest treason/ To do the right thing for the wrong reason." (30) It is his only personal profit and prestige he has in mind, not preserving morality and ethical actions.

Chapter XIII returns to Ethan as narrator as he mulls over his present position. Again he senses ambiguity.

I had thought I could put a process in motion and control it at every turn - even stop it when I wanted to. And now the frightening conviction grew in me, that such a process may become a thing in itself, a person almost, having its own ends and means and quite independent of its creator. And another troublesome thought came in. Did I really start it, or did I simply not resist it? I may have been the mover, but was I not also the moved?" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.210).

But considering history, he recognizes that morals are simply words. The upright citizen can also be corrupt beneath the surface. As Ethan says: "A deliberate encirclement was moving on the New Baytown, and it was set in motion by honorable men. If they succeeded, they would be thought not crooked but clever" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.211). In fact, to most

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(30) T.S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, in The Collected Works of T. S. Eliot, (New York, 1958), p.196.

of the world, success is never bad. Ethan cites positive views of Hitler, Mussolini, Vichy, and Stalin as examples.

Strength and success - they are above morality, above criticism. It seems, then, that it is not what you do, but how you do it and what you call it. Is there a check in men, deep in them, that stops or punishes? There doesn't seem to be. The only punishment is for failure. In effect no crime is committed unless a criminal is caught (Winter of Our Discontent, p.211).

For a moment the reader might consider Ethan's reflections as a struggle with his conscience, but for him it is mere exercise. In fact, what amazes him most was

that it (his evil) seemed to plan itself. One thing grew out of another and everything fitted together. I watched it grow and only guided it with the lightest touch (Winter of Our Discontent, p.211).

To him, the end justifies the means, and he argues that he does not need or want to be a citizen of this gray and dangerous country. Yet he persists in his persecution of Marullo and, oddly enough, despite his put downs and criticisms, Marullo persists in liking him and treating him specially. Given this special treatment, it would seem more likely that Ethan would sympathize with Marullo's plight, rather than attempt to ruin him. However, instead, Ethan places the blame for his continued persecution of his boss on fate.

Some outside force or design seemed to have taken control of events so that they were crowded close the way cattle are in a loading chute. I know the opposite can be true. Sometimes the force or design deflects or destroys, no matter how careful and deep the planning. I guess that's why we believe in luck and unluck (Winter of Our Discontent, p.214).

Like Charley Edwards, a major that he met in the army, Ethan believes that he has learned to carefully divide the good from the bad, a task that is virtually impossible. If Charley could categorize and compartmentalize the two, there would be no danger of overlap and confusion of duty. One part of him would believe in love, care and giving, while another part could glory in hate, mistrust and destruction. Unfortunately, this dichotomy is not absolute, and often the two selves overlap.

In examining his family through Edwards' thought mechanism, Ethan finds the outlines of his ancestors and how they are "vague and wavery where they should have been sharp as photographs" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.216). Similarly in his own son's face he no longer sees the perfectibility of man but rather miserable discontent. Only Ellen and Mary retain the positive emphasis Ethan desires: Ellen, holding the talisman, willingly carries and passes on what is immortal in Ethan, and Mary shelters and protects him from evil.

Waking Mary, Ethan mimics the annunciation to the Virgin - he has tidings of great joy. But for Mary, the good news is that the god of materialism and riches is to be born - Marullo has offered Ethan a paid vacation for the Fourth of July. Even Steinbeck's model 'good' character is unable to follow Calvin's directive that those in narrow and slender circumstances should learn to bear their wants patiently, "that they may not become immodestly desirous of

things." (31) However, despite the good news, Ethan's prospects are dark in his conscience. Again Steinbeck uses dark and light imagery to symbolize Ethan's plight. His coffee is black as the eye of despair (Winter of Our Discontent, p.220) and without any white in it.

Ethan's ultimate surrender to his new god, money, is evident in his description of Mr. Baker's bank. The safe has mystic numbers and is described as a holy of holies. Meanwhile, Ethan stands in awe "outside the rail, like a humble communicant waiting for the sacrament" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.221). His conversation with Baker regarding Marullo is covered with the facade of concern since he recognizes Marullo is trapped by the illegal entry charge and may be willing to sell the store. Baker, of course, encourages Ethan's ploy and reminds him of the positive nature of his good bargaining position. Ironically, he also warns Ethan that Marullo might cheat him, thinking nothing of Ethan's intention to do the same to Marullo.

Chapter XIV begins the second half of the year - July 1, a midpoint in the year, a date Ethan "had foreseen as a boundary marker for me - yesterday one kind of me, tomorrow a different kind" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.226). He justifies his actions by saying that for him his duplicity is a temporary change, trading a habit of conduct and attitude

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(31)Calvin, Vol. II, ch. x, p. 34.

for comfort and dignity and a cushion of security. His objective is limited, and once it is achieved, Ethan feels he will be able to take back his old personality. Comparing his change to his war experience, he argues that though he killed, war did not make a killer of him. His goal is to "know the limited objective for what it was, and once it was achieved, to stop the process in its tracks" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.226). Nevertheless, the pain of betrayal still reaches him, and he seeks out the talisman and another secret "cave" in a backyard tree. As defined by his aunt, the stone had become an amulet to avert evil or to bring fortune to the bearer. According to Aunt Deborah, the talisman has as much power as its owner endows it with. Yet Ethan is still torn between opposites as his description of July indicates.

July is brass where June is gold, and lead where June is silver. July leaves are heavy and fat and crowding. Birdsong of July is flatulent refrain without passion for the nests are empty now and dumpy fledglings teeter clumsily. No, July is not a month of promise or of fulfillment (Winter of Our Discontent, p.228).

Ethan proceeds to take the talisman and walk along the shoreline of New Baytown. His isolation is stressed even more but he still decides to go through with his betrayal. In fact, in his discussion with Stoney Smith, the city constable, he finds that such betrayal is not uncommon. Stoney has been summoned by a grand jury in the name of progress. In fact, Stoney seems to have more of a conscience than Ethan, as he says, "Eth, do you think it's right to make a man tell on his

friends to save himself?" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.235).

Later, Ethan finds that many of the town officials have been indicted. Ethan sympathizes because "they'd been doing it so long they didn't think it was wrong" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.239). Sadly, he again does not see the similarity in his own action. Later, however, he begins to recognize that betrayal and sin are everybody's crime. It is a crime that fills Ethan with ambiguous feelings. He is "cold and hot, full and empty" at the same time (Winter of Our Discontent, p.240). At times, changing personalities is only a game Ethan plays, but he realizes its deadly serious results. He never knew when the game stopped being a game. He still thought of it "as not a crime against men, only against money. No one would get hurt. Money is insured" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.241). He continues to rationalize his crimes against men and realizes if he could do what he did to Danny, the flagrant theft from the bank was nothing. For Ethan "All of it is temporary. None of it would ever have to be repeated" (Winter of Our Discontent, pp.241-242). Since only money gets money, Ethan feels that "the process of getting it, designed as daydreams, stood up remarkably when inspected. That robbery was unlawful troubled me very little" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.244).

As indicated before, his guilt about men is similarly dismissed. Marullo is no problem because, given the same circumstances, he would have reacted the same way. Danny is

more troubling, but Ethan calms himself with the realization that if he hadn't betrayed him, someone else would have done so. Even though Danny remains a burning in his guts, Ethan is able to wall it off with forgetfulness and to heal it in time. All that remained is the risk of the robbery itself, and even that is a lesser issue. The real issue is that Ethan is determined to ignore the demands of morality and has decided to become a master instead of a servant.

When the day of the crime arrives, the physical description once more alludes to duality - the July sun is fighting off thunderheads, but again evil seems to conquer. Ethan is determined, however, to see only justification for his immoral action, and he hurries to find corroborating witnesses for an alibi. However, his well-laid plans are shattered by the appearance of a government agent who throws off Ethan's perfect timing for a perfect crime. He is forced to abandon the plot. Nonetheless, fate is with Ethan, for the agent announces that Marullo is giving Ethan the store. Thus, the robbery is no longer necessary and the money Ethan was going to use for the purchase can now be used for stock.

The agent announces Marullo's motivation; he is shocked by Ethan's honesty. It is the opposite of all Marullo learned in his early years. Despite America's high sounding ideals, he has discovered its real motto is "A guy has got to make a buck! Look out for number one" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.255). Ethan, however, does not fit this selfish mode.

Consequently, Marullo believes Ethan's racket is honesty and as the agent states, "Marullo wants to make you a kind of monument to something he believed in once" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 255). This is, of course, supremely ironic, since Ethan has only used honesty as a foil to hide his real intentions of destroying Marullo. Marullo sees Ethan as "his down payment, kind of, so the light won't go out" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 256), and the agent, too, has sacrificed and extended effort to assure the continuation of a morality he admires. Though it is a four-hour drive in traffic, it wouldn't wait, "so the light won't go out!" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.256).

When the store closes, Ethan also discovers that Joey Morphy had sensed the potential crime and the chances were great that Ethan would have been caught. The talisman, which Ethan had as an oversight kept with him, had protected him. Like Marullo, Ethan, too feels a renewed desire for the light even though he has ignored it for a time. An inherent obligation to see the truth confronts him and he remembers the wonder words of Aunt Deborah (The Winter of Our Discontent, p.262). I believe that Robert Bedford's reading of this section offers an important insight into the novel. Bedford points out that these words, really two quotations reprinted in original old English, have been a stumbling block for many critics, but provide the keystone for interpretation of the novel. The first is Eve's account of how she was tempted by



the serpent in Caedmon's Genesis. The second, though spliced to the first, is from Boethius' De Consolatione de Philosophiae. In the first passage, Eve protests her inculpability for her action; the snake is her scapegoat. Yet the second passage suggests that man, like the lion, contains something of the wild, and given the proper opportunity, will revert back to his original animalistic and wild state. Combined with the fact that Ethan's talisman also contains a serpent, it is my contention that the wonder words provide a significant insight into moral ambiguity.

Specifically the quotes reveal Ethan as innately evil, the wild lion yet unwilling to accept his sinful heritage. Instead the blame is laid elsewhere. Indeed, Bedford himself suggests that both texts are related to free will and depravity - man's choice and opportunity to exercise his innate and purely human characteristic. Man is only innately man since neither innate good, nor innate bad, is totally clear. All acts are essentially morally ambiguous and the blend of good and evil is merely a given that Ethan must accept (32). Consequently, man's choices are hopelessly inadequate and always based on the individual's biased evaluation of the situation. Symbolically it is important that Aunt Deborah is "an oracle and pythoness in one" for it allows Ethan to remember that she too had the inevitable blend

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(32) Bedford, p.284.

of good and evil and that the past also contained the ridiculous and the sublime. Ethan now can identify with Aunt Deborah as an ancestor, who despite her heritage was unlike Eve and responsibly made choices without regard to immediate environmental influences. (33) Surely Steinbeck, as indicated in East of Eden and other books of his canon, felt man was capable of such positive action and repeated the second quote to emphasize it. As Bedford concludes, "In The Winter of Our Discontent there is a story like all stories--the single story there is--of man's tragi-comically futile attempt to distinguish good and evil." (34) By telling it, Steinbeck gives us a heritage lesson from which we may profit.

When Ethan returns home he attempts to physically cleanse himself by washing his face raw and brushing his teeth till his gums bleed. Everything seems to have worked out well for Ethan, and he and Mary even plan a Fourth of July vacation to Montauk Moors. The symbolic use of the date, of course, reflects the moral uprightness of the founding fathers and the promise of land of justice, love and equality. While at the hotel, Ethan reveals his good news and bad news about Marullo. A short time later, Mary reveals that their son, Allen, has won an honorable mention in the "I Love America" contest.

Given Steinbeck's earlier hints about plagiarism and Ethan's surprise vacation and comment that Allen doesn't have

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(33) Bedford, p.290.

(34) Bedford, p.291.

a ghost writer, the reader suspects that the sin of the father has been inherited by the son. Yet Ethan himself does not suspect. Initially he is exultant and full of pride at Allen's accomplishment, but suddenly he is afflicted with Weltschmerz, or world sorrow. As Ethan and Mary prepare to go home to celebrate, Ethan announces that there is only one kind of celebrity. In typical moral ambiguity, the hotel manager identifies the word with clean-cut Dick Clark but Ethan equates it with criminals such as Caryl Chessman and John Dillinger (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 273). The duality of man is constant.

Allen's response to his new-found status is unassuming. As Steinbeck says, he accepted "greatness with grace" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 274). Ellen, on the other hand, seems to harbor jealousy and very late at night is seen by Ethan "recharging her battery" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 276) by touching the talisman. Despite Ethan's pride, he is unable to sleep, and his dreams haunt him. Especially significant is his Judas kiss for Danny which awakens him and sends him scurrying for the store. There, instead of chasing the cat which haunts the rear entrance, he feeds it. This act is an indication of still another change to come, as Bedford notes, "Hawley is now ready for a second metamorphosis - the shedding of a foul skin."(35) Yet Ethan's present analysis of the times

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(35) Bedford, p.287.

only indicates that his discontent has gradually changed to anger, and his anger has vented itself in violent action. In a passage reminiscent of the Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden, Ethan suggests that his actions are part of a trend, a revitalizing of an American heritage.

The year of 1960 was a year of change, a year when secret fears come into the open, when discontent stops being dormant and changes gradually to anger. It wasn't only in me or in New Baytown. Presidential nominations would be coming up soon and in the air the discontent was changing to anger and with the excitement anger brings. And it wasn't only the nation. The whole world stirred with restlessness as discontent moved to anger and anger tried to find an outlet in action, any action, so long as it was violent (Winter of Our Discontent, pp.280-281).

When Mr. Baker returns, he attempts to assume Ethan's former stance of unknowing participant in the betrayal of the town officials. His fake concern for those he has set up leads to Ethan's mistrust. But Baker even suggests that Ethan run for town manager as a respectable new face. Ethan hedges on his acceptance of the offer and in a subtle manner accuses Baker of a previous duplicity in the past, implying that his grandfather allegedly set fire to the Belle-Adair, the Hawley ship, in order to gain insurance.

After Baker leaves, Ethan confronts Biggers and solidly plays his hand for a bigger kickback than he had been offered. As Biggers says, "You're smart. If I didn't know it before, I know it now. Six percent. Jesus!" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.285). But Ethan's confidence wilts when Constable Stoney announces that Danny's body has been found in the cellar hole

of his old house, where Ethan and Danny shared so many adventures. It is as though part of Ethan has died too. He has betrayed his brother and caused his death. The innocent yet experienced Danny/Adam has taken his own life in the face of the world where he can no longer cope whereas, Ethan, a Cain/ Judas/Christ symbol, has modified his behavior in order to survive, has succumbed to the necessities which are required to be successful. The realization of Danny's ultimate sacrifice plunges Ethan into darkness. He closes the door, draws the shade and sits on the leather hatbox that symbolizes his moral rectitude as a knight. Soon he is enveloped in dim green darkness (Winter of Our Discontent, p.287).

News of Danny's death spreads rapidly, and when Ethan goes to the bank, Baker commiserates that Danny's death will deprive him of the airfield. When Ethan produces the will and the promissory notes, Baker is stunned. It is as though he now sees someone he hadn't known existed. Ethan further shocks him by demanding 51% of the corporation or partnership Baker will form in order to build the airfield. In conceited uprightness, Baker questions Ethan's motive and whether his actions make him feel good. Ethan retorts that Baker also had tried to corrupt Danny, and again charges that his ancestors had burned the Hawley ship. Baker gives in and poses the possibility that Ethan can be both a partner and the town manager. Surprisingly, Ethan resists the temptation and calls

it a conflict of interest. He will not fall into the same trap as the previous administration. He informs Baker that he will no longer be treated as a pleasant fool nor will he feel like a criminal since Baker's guilt is as great as his own.

Chapter XXI lets the reader observe Ethan's celebration at Allen's success. Observing his son as world-wise and cynical, Ethan senses that the boy is still galled by the thought of work and education as roads to success. He would prefer the easy way. Mary's comment, "I guess he's born to it" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 295), is meant to reveal his similarity to Ethan. Ethan again quotes the words of Richard III's soliloquy as a recognition of Allen's accomplishment (Winter of Our Discontent, p.295). In this new picture the role of Richard has been assumed by Allen rather than Ethan, and now Ethan functions as the ancestor, the Duke of York, whose greed for the throne taught all his sons so well. Ethan again feels the need to seek out the "place" and "smooth his raggedness" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.297).

On the way to the waterfront he confronts the last temptation of the moral wasteland, Margie Young-Hunt, who again tries to seduce him. As Donna Gerstenberger points out, the echoes of T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" are clear. Margie is desperate, and she knows about both Danny and Marullo. As she says to Ethan, "I set you up as a backlog, but I don't trust you. You might break the rules. You might turn honest. I tell you, I'm scared" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.301).

Blackmail is out of the question, but Margie feels Ethan will need her friendship to quell his guilt. His heritage of Hawley-ness will not allow Ethan to enjoy his new-found wealth. "I'm betting ten generations of Hawleys are going to kick your ass around the block and when they leave off you'll have your own wet rope and salt to rub in the wounds" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.302).

Yet Ethan escapes both Margie and an influential gentleman, who also is searching for him in a big Chrysler with a chauffeur. It is as if he has heeded Joey Morpheus and begun a walk with God. However, the ultimate realization of his corruption and how it has rubbed off on others does not come until Dunscombe, the man in the Chrysler, reveals the trickery of Allen's essay. Ethan's son has pieced together parts of speeches by the founding fathers, and the resulting composition has almost tricked the committee. Only an anonymous postcard has tipped them off to Allen's duplicity.

Surprisingly Dunscombe is not concerned about moral rectitude; he only wants silence from Ethan and Allen, and he is even willing to pay a price to obtain it. "We could work something out. Scholarship or like that - something dignified" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 307). Ethan is appalled and says, "Has sin gone on strike for a wage raise? No, just go away now - please"! (Winter of Our Discontent, p.307). Searching for the talisman for strength he discovers still more details. Ellen is the anonymous letter-writer who

in true moral uprightness has turned in her own brother. In a reversal of Ethan's acts with Danny, she has been her brother's keeper. After being punched by Allen, Ellen reveals to her father her fear and concern, her good motives for the revelation. But Allen himself is angered. It isn't fair that he has lost when everybody does it. "Everybody right up to the top - just read the papers. I bet you took some in your time, because they all do. I'm not going to take the rap for everybody. I don't care about anything" (Winter of Our Discontent, p.308). As Garcia notes, it is at this point that the novel's central metaphor reaches its climax. Steinbeck succeeds in threading together a number of betrayals - Christ, Marullo, Danny, the corrupt city fathers and now Ethan, Jr. (36) Combined with Ethan's betrayal of himself and his principles, Winter of Our Discontent thus shows us how easily corruption can be transformed into righteousness by rationalization.

After hearing Allen's disgusting and pessimistic view, Ethan contemplates suicide and returns to the "place" to slit his wrists. However, Steinbeck causes the light/darkness imagery to return in order to convince Ethan that such an action would be foolish. Bedford notes the symbolic setting here. "Located opposite Whitsun Reef, named with almost too obvious reference to that commemoration of the descent of the



Holy Spirit on the Apostles, the Place is accessible only at low tide."(37) Thus in the depths and despair, Ethan comes to the realization that everyone carries his own light--his own sense of morals and virtuous thoughts. However, since he has himself extinguished and blackened his virtues, he now desires to die to reach the other side of home where the lights are given (Winter of Our Discontent, p.311).

Yet he also recognizes that the lights of the past (Old Cap'n and Aunt Deborah) and the lights of the present (Marullo) still shine. In addition, the tide is on the rise when he enters his cave. The sea-change, the life-giving water, again related to T.S. Eliot's imagery in The Wasteland, restores his hopes. In addition the light bearer of the future, Ellen, is ready to assume her moral task as well. As he reaches for the razor blades to slit his wrists, Ethan discovers the talisman instead. Its discovery motivates his leaving of the cave and dismissing suicide. Indeed it has become his salvation. As Bedford says, "The talisman may come to symbolize the riddle of life itself which each must confront alone and interpret to the best of his ability.(38) As Ethan puts it, no matter that his light was out and blacker than a wick. The talisman is necessary to its new owner, "else another light might go out" (Winter of Our Discontent, p. 311).

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(37)Bedford, p.287.

(38)Bedford, p.289.

Appropriately Steinbeck closes the novel with ambiguity for the reader is unsure of both Ethan's future and that of his family. The heritage of truth, justice and honesty is hanging in the balance and its continuance is unsure. It is still threatened by materialism, greed and selfishness. The outcome remains in question; a question which will never be decided absolutely for the moral dilemma of America is inherent in all men, and each must make his own individual choice and commitment. As Garcia notes, it is a record of the country's malaise, of its unfulfilled dreams and unmet obligations and of what happens to principles, to dreams and ideals in the case of moneylenders.(39)

It is my belief that this novel is a success despite what some critics would consider obvious flaws of diction and characterization. Although at first glance Ethan's euphemistic nicknames for Mary and his preaching to the canned goods may seem stupid and far-fetched, I believe that these elements are merely experiments in technique and in fact foreshadow the absurdist black comedy of writers like Joseph Heller and John Irving. Ethan's conversational tone may seem unrealistic but then Yossarian in Catch 22 and Garp in The World According to Garp also suffer from the same problem. Their way of dealing with an absurd world is similar to Ethan's. They create a clever laughing mask of unconcern and

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(39)Garcia, p.245.

apathy. The only way they can face reality is by 'clowning' and pretending that the 'real' is fantastic and incomprehensible. If the comic mask falls so too does the ability of the character to cope with a sin-sick world.

I personally find that Steinbeck's relation of Ethan's dilemma is believable and that I can empathize with and perhaps even feel sympathy for him despite his evil betrayal of his best friend and his seemingly flippant attitude about his 'immoral' life and actions. For me Ethan remains a fascinating protagonist that I can relate to and can either love or hate. In fact, as a symbol of man's best and worst, Ethan provides all Americans with a mirror image of themselves. He allows each of us to see our dark side and its opposite and to decide with him about which force we will allow to dominate our lives.

In addition, the complexity of symbolism, both patriotic and national, while at the same time religious and Biblical, makes Winter Of Our Discontent an excellent example of the well-crafted tale. Steinbeck's interweaving of opposites, his merging of symbols and his experimentation in style and humor make the novel a worthy successor to The Grapes of Wrath as a social document calling all of America to account for its ambivalent reaction and commitment to moral uprightness.

In Steinbeck's final novel, the theme of moral ambiguity returns with great strength and is presented in a more objective manner. There is a delicate balance maintained as

Steinbeck reveals Ethan's duality. As the novel ends the reader is uncertain of what will happen to the protagonist and whether to read Ethan's final actions as positive or negative. Ultimately Steinbeck realized that neither extreme offered an acceptable ending. Since there are no simple solutions to the moral dilemma, Steinbeck wisely refrains from giving any. Rather he lets each reader bring to the conclusion of the novel his own experience and his own feelings. Personally, given Steinbeck's philosophy of hope, I feel that Ethan's double deaths and resurrections have been worth the pain and will make him a better man. But even if the opposite were true, Steinbeck would still have succeeded in forcing me as a reader into deep self-introspection. Such self-knowledge and insight was surely what Steinbeck wished for those who appreciated and understood Winter of Our Discontent.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY: SOME POSSIBLE MOTIVES FOR STEINBECK'S USE OF MORAL AMBIGUITY

Madeleine La Engle, known primarily in the fictional world for her allegorical "children's" literature with an adult appeal, has in recent years presented lectures in Christian educational settings across the United States. In a January, 1982, lecture at Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest, Illinois, La Engle delineated the worth of a fabulist or allegorist in today's society. La Engle's assessment pointed out that today's society is impaled on paradox, and reality has become so tainted it appears unreal. Thus the function of the allegorist is to attempt to create a valid myth to live by and live for in this weary world. Such an author speaks to an adult/child who is frightened by man's increasing smallness and who demands a greater place in the scheme of things. In creating a "story" the fabulist looks for truth and attempts

to catch up inwardly with all that assaults him outwardly. Ultimately his/her stories give the reader models in their search for the truth of living. The dialogue between writer and reader is, in this sense, two introspective persons listening with all their heart and keeping the words in their souls. La Engle concluded that the motive of such writers is to help man find the answer to the eternal question: "Who am I?"

David Bakan, in his book, The Duality of Human Existence, further clarifies the necessity for myths and fables. Distinguishing between two types of living, agency (living for self) and communion (living for others), Bakan notes that American society has increasingly become agentic and man, without a literature of hope, is increasingly unable to cope with it. He says:

There is a rising sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, and absurdity. There is the condition in which comforts make us uneasy; where creative energies choke us for not finding something worth the effort; where love becomes dry, formal, and ritualized; where there is anxiety that knows of no reasonable reason; where there is a sense that there is something which mastery itself cannot master.(1)

While both Bakan and La Engle provide a *raison d'etre* for Steinbeck's writing, Bakan's theorem of agency and communion is especially related to Steinbeck in that it mirrors his concern with the morality of the individual vs. the morality of the 'group animal'. In Steinbeck's view, man

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(1)David Bakan, The Duality of Human Existence, (Boston, Mass., 1966), p.14.

is plagued by indecision over which of the two is most important. Eventually Steinbeck discovered like Bakan that 'agency'(self-centered living) and 'communion' (other centered living) were integral yet opposite points of an integrated whole. They exist paradoxically and simultaneously in all men. As Bakan states,

agency [stands for] the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in the lack of separations. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation, and aloneness; communion in contact, openness, and union. Agency manifests itself in the urge to master; communion in noncontractual cooperation. Agency manifests itself in the repression of thought, feeling, and impulse; communion in the lack and removal of repression. (2)

Eventually Bakan's research concludes with Max Weber that "the intrinsic unity of Protestantism and capitalism lies in the fact that they both involve exaggeration of agency and repression of communion."(3) As many critics have observed, as a result of this interrelationship, truly significant American writers were strongly influenced by the resulting struggle between the opposite poles of human action. In fact, the introduction to this dissertation has delineated how many other authors were intrigued by the paradoxes of human motivation and action which resulted from the interaction of

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(2)Bakan, p.15.

(3)Bakan, p.16.

agency and communion within America's religious and economic heritage. But Bakan also helps his reader to recognize a paradoxical contradiction inherent in combining a god-fearing other-oriented life-style and a self-centered materialistic one. Explaining Weber's thesis, he states,

Thus, Weber pointed out how the concern with salvation among Calvinists is associated not with neglect but with devotion to secular affairs; asceticism is associated not with eschewing wealth but with its increase; predestination by God is associated not with the surrender of initiative but with its heightening; and the alienation of man from man is associated with superiority in social organization.(4)

The contradictory nature of Puritan doctrine is again revealed as central to this thematic emphasis. In assessing Steinbeck's relation to the literary heritage created from this conflict, Ray Griffith is correct when he states that

Steinbeck's duality takes the peculiarly American form of the prolonged abrasion between the expansive philosophy of transcendentalism espoused by Emerson and the limiting doctrines of total natural depravity and predestination inherent in Calvinist Puritanism.(5)

In fact Steinbeck, like Darwin, presents what Bakan describes as

the most critical paradox that man must live with, of the possibility that all that is characteristically associated with evil is, in some way, intimately intertwined with good, the notion that the sins of mankind, sex, aggression, and avarice, are related to the survival of mankind...(6)

He also allows man "to have a good look at what he thought was

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(4)Bakan, p.17.

(5)Griffith, p.48.

(6)Bakan, p.37.



so ignoble in himself" and to discover how he is able to "aggrandize the constitution of man by facing that which, at first sight, appears to be ignoble." (7) Bakan postulates that if "the dread of the demonic, the dread of the primitive, the dread of the dark forces of the mind of man, [are] in some way related to the things which we value most positively, life and progress," (8) then moral ambiguity is an inescapable fact of life which allows man to deny the validity of absolutes and thus rationalize what appears to be "good" as evil and what appears to be evil as good. Thus separation, mastery and denial can be exalted in the new world; while communion, submission and confession can be debased and debunked.

This is precisely the paradox of living that Steinbeck presented in his fiction, and, as the fabulist/allegorist, he was attempting to use symbols for the wordlessness, to express his insights into the human condition in a fictional mode. By using this method, he would benefit his fellow human beings, rather than appear to be upbraiding and criticizing them. In portraying the moral dilemma, he attempts to untangle the apparent contradiction and urges men to adapt a moral stance of "good" (communion) in spite of their tendency to find "good" in the agentic. Such a concern has, of course, endeared him to the American public. For example, a recent newspaper article noted the influence of Steinbeck on the

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(7) Bakan, p.37.

(8) Bakan, p.37.

people of Salinas.

Steinbeck changed or influenced their lives in some way...by pointing to themes that are universal and timeless, fundamental and intensely personal--good and evil, love and rejection, compassion and injustice; something for everyone...people feel a oneness with Steinbeck, that he knows people's hearts.(9)

However, this very popularity has been his undoing. Thus, despite Steinbeck's predilection toward such a vital theme as duality and moral ambiguity, critics have been unable to understand his appeal and have persisted in personal tirades against either his style, his structure or his content.

Given his popularity, it is surprising that, although several Steinbeck critics have noted parts of his moral concern, no serious effort has been made to tie in this thematic emphasis as a possible reason for the mixed reputation that his works have received. Instead, his ability to hold two contradictory ideas at the same time proved unacceptable to the minds of most critics and resulted in a diverse reputation for the artist. I believe that such critics fail to realize that this perception of duality is, in fact, the unifying concern of the most significant post-World War II novels. As Jonathan Baumbach states, these works deal with man's "confrontation with the objectification of his primordial self and his exemplary spiritual passage from innocence to guilt to redemption," and they "delineate the

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(9)Chicago Tribune, August 25, 1982, Section 3, pp.1 and 16.

burden and ambivalence of personal responsibility in a world which accomodates evil--that nightmare landscape we all inhabit."(10) I believe that in the preceding analysis of the five so-called lesser works, this paper has substantiated that all the Steinbeck canon is concerned with man's plight as a fallen yet redeemed creature. In fact it seems obvious that although Steinbeck was essentially pessimistic when he first confronted duality in his writing, his continued portrayal of the problem does seem to show a sense of progress over the years.

Indeed, the five works analyzed give positive evidence of this shifting perspective on duality and are helpful in seeing the shifting philosophies of the author. Such shifting is not surprising since most critics agree that Steinbeck's vital personality is altogether too vibrant to have remained stagnant over the years. In fact, I believe that most intelligent readers would be inclined to disagree with R.W.B. Lewis' contention that "there is no such coherent and meaningful evolution in Steinbeck's work, though he began reasonably enough in the recognizably American vein and went on to identify, and respond boldly to the contemporary challenge."(11) As Harry Morris suggests "Perhaps we have

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(10)Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, (New York, 1965), p.2-3.

(11)R.W.B. Lewis, "John Steinbeck: The Fitful Daemon," in The Young Rebel in American Literature. (New York, 1960), pp.166-167.

witnessed (in Winter of Our Discontent) in Steinbeck himself an orthodox conversion, which once witnessed gives us cause to look for signs in previous writings."(12) As this paper has shown, even Steinbeck's non-fictional works (his letters, his films, etc.) display a growing preoccupation with the theme. However, over the years there is clearly an increase in Steinbeck's optimism about mankind's potential to overcome his inclination toward evil rather than good and to triumph rather than face defeat. I believe Steinbeck's biographers, Jackson Benson and Thomas Kiernan, and Steinbeck critic Richard Astro, all offer information which is helpful in determining the progression of this theme and its close relationship to events in Steinbeck's personal life. Unfortunately, up to this point no one has attempted to use Steinbeck's biographical data to understand moral ambiguity's prominent yet changing place in his work. By combining and correlating available data, I believe it is possible not only to see Steinbeck's preoccupation but to account for its shifting development. By doing this, it is possible to understand what Steinbeck's critics have called incomprehensible. For what might appear at first to be contradictory is, in fact, a very believable progression that relies heavily on events in Steinbeck's life.

Kiernan's often overlooked biography is valuable because

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(12) Harry Morris, Steinbeck: A Handbook to His Major Works: A Study Guide, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, (Metuchen, NJ, 1979), p.159.

it establishes Steinbeck's plight as an only son. These early years were marked by rebellion against an overbearing mother and a stern and humorless father.(13) His negative relationship with his parents was further complicated by his homeliness. Kiernan states, "His face still had a rodent-like aspect, however, one that was compounded by the unyielding sprung ears that jutted from his head at a sharp angle,"(14) and notes that both his mother and his sisters called him animal names such as squirrel, muskrat and mouse. Thus, Steinbeck's glum outlook in his early novels and the consequent victory of dark forces in such works as Cup of Gold, To A God Unknown, and Pastures of Heaven, is surely related to his own sense of guilt, loneliness and rejection which was magnified out of all proportion during his formative years.

Although he may not have been aware of it, I believe it is safe to say that his perception of duality began quite early. As he notes in his introduction to The Acts of King Arthur, his fascination began during childhood while reading Malory.

I think my sense of right and wrong...came from this secret book... I was not frightened to find that there were evil knights, as well as noble ones. In my own town there were men who wore the clothes of virtue whom I knew to be bad. In pain or sorrow or confusion, I went back to

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(13)Thomas Kiernan, John Steinbeck: The Intricate Music, (Boston, 1979), p.35.

(14)Kiernan, p.9.

my magic book. Children are violent and cruel--and good--and I was all of these--and all of these were in the secret book. If I could not choose my way at the crossroads of love and loyalty, neither could Lancelot. I could understand the darkness of Mordred because he was in me too; and there was some Galahad in me, but perhaps not enough. The Grail feeling was there, however, deep-planted, and perhaps always will be.(15)

As he continued to mature, his preoccupation with moral ambiguity grew as well. Benson notes that even his early college writing, "Adventures in Arcademy," contains "a fabric of paradox and non-sequitur which constantly hint at a wisdom hidden in the folds of allegory."(16) No doubt Steinbeck's tendency to write in this style grew from his own unsatisfactory feeling with his home life. Kiernan notes,

John was reluctant to cultivate his intensifying desire to find another world. At the same time he was powerless to restrain it as it turned from instinct into conscious thought. He was thus thrust into a deep but indistinct moral dilemma - his obligation to his family and its principles versus his compulsion to find and define himself.(17)

Consequently, Steinbeck seems to have realized that in composing literature, he was able to find a way to express his own frustrations at his own duality. He could create characters who emulated his deep belief in himself and his commitment to humanity, while at the same time he could also portray his other side by forming characters who illustrated his contradictory desire for escape and non-involvement. In

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(15) John Steinbeck. The Acts of King Arthur (New York, 1976), p.4-5.

(16) Benson, p.60.

(17) Kiernan, p.35.

fact, in college, under the influence of Edith Mirrielees, Steinbeck learned that there are no new ideas in literature, just new characters who in their fictional interactions express old ideas differently. He also explored American literature and found that many of its features included a concern with the conflict between good and evil and the hero's striving for moral rectitude. Steinbeck's clever mind, of course, associated this thematic tendency with the Arthurian tradition. This was significant, since by his own admission, Malory's Morte d'Arthur was the most influential book in his life. (18)

At this point in his career, he also seemed to have discovered that there was an inherent and insoluble dilemma involved with making moral choices and deciding right from wrong. This was evident from the many fictional works which he read as well as from his own experiences in life. Specifically Kiernan notes that,

From his early years, Steinbeck had struggled with this paradox [of sacrificing individuality to fit into society]. Inspired by his childhood reading, he had been instilled with a need to nurture and expand his individuality. Yet all around him he perceived that individuality was considered eccentric and undesirable.(19)

Consequently, since much of Steinbeck's reading revolved about allegorical and fabulist books including the Bible, it was inevitable that he would eventually resort to the allegorical

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(18)See Kiernan, pp.35, 93.

(19)Kiernan, p.124.

form to deliver his perceptions. And because his early writing endeavors tended to philosophical preachiness, it was doubly inevitable. As Edith Mirrielees had pointed out to him when he first started in her classes at Stanford, allegory, expertly carried out, was a very effective way to moralize without boring or offending the reader.(20) Moreover, I believe that the influence of paradox continued as Steinbeck continued to read in the American classics, such as Thoreau's Walden Pond, which championed the individual in the paradox between the individual acting from his own uniquely human impulses and the individual acting from the more herdlike animal demands of the social group to which he belonged.(21) In fact he realized after intense study that Thoreau's doctrine

carried with it a paradox in its own right, however. For on the one hand it insisted that man, to properly fulfill his function, must remain intensely individualistic. On the other it demanded that the individual man be selflessly altruistic, providing succor, protection and resources to others--men, animals, things--as they provided these things to him. The paradox both confused Steinbeck and bewitched him. (22)

In his early work, therefore, Steinbeck's concentration is primarily on recognition of duality rather than on doing something about it. As Kiernan says,

He saw man's primary struggle as being one between his "individual" and "group" characters. Although man was

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(20) See Kiernan, p.125.

(21) See Kiernan, p.139.

(22) Kiernan, p.139.



doomed to sacrifice his individuality to the pressures of the group, the struggle itself--man's recognition of the dichotomy in himself and his self-conscious attempt to act on and resolve it--was a cause for optimism...In their reflective musings on their fates, his characters at least came to the realization that their dismal destinies could have been different had they only been able to act out of different, more enlightened impulses.(23)

Consequently, in Cup of Gold and Pastures of Heaven, deterministic fate appears much more likely to conquer and defeat than it does in the later fiction. Although some optimism is evident, the general tone of Steinbeck's work at this point is much more depressing and glum than the positive feelings generated by such works as East of Eden. It is as though Steinbeck followed a rollercoaster of emotion in his life. Thus the early works are more likely to illustrate the relative success of fatalistic patterns and negatives and applaud man's stark determination to resist despite life's vicissitudes rather than to visualize his success in overcoming such dilemmas.

On the other hand, his later productions indicate a more positive vein of thought in which both man's potential and hopes are magnified. In these works, Steinbeck centers on man's ability to change rather than be changed by absolutes. Eventually this optimism was costly as, like Ibsen's protagonist Dr. Stockman in The Enemy of the People, Steinbeck began to see himself as the lonely idealist, a man

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(23)Kiernan, p.140.

cast out from and opposed by the respectable majority--a man ahead of his time, radical in his adherence to principle and to his vision.(24) Yet paradox continued to fascinate the young author. He wrote to Bob Cathcart,

Like a great number of young writers (me for instance) you are very much, almost too much, interested in paradox, aren't you? When analyzed, paradox holds water with difficulty as a theme literesque, and yet the bulk of modern writing grabs it and will not let it go. It has the same hold on modern writing that coincidence did on that of the period just finished. (3/1/29) (25)

Although Steinbeck was enamoured with the dilemma of moral ambiguity quite early, I believe that his meeting with Ed Ricketts in October, 1930 and their eventual deep friendship produced perhaps the most singular effect on the author's thematic emphasis. Ed, too, had a vivid perception of the paradox of life, and he helped Steinbeck to refine and clarify his own views. For example, Steinbeck quotes Ricketts as saying,

Adults in their dealings with children are insane...And children know it too. Adults lay down rules they would not think of following, speak truths they do not believe. And yet they expect children to obey the rules, believe the truths, and admire and respect their parents for this nonsense. Children must be very wise and secret to tolerate adults at all.(26)

Such perceptions were, of course shared with Steinbeck and such contact with a parallel thinker gave focus and direction to the later works in Steinbeck's canon.

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(24)See Benson, p.70.

(25)Benson, p.149.

(26)Benson, p.186.

Richard Astro contends that knowledge of Ricketts' contribution to Steinbeck's philosophy is central to understanding Steinbeck's success. In fact, he posits that the biases of critics and their failure to examine Ricketts' influence have resulted in a short-sighted and incomplete view of Steinbeck's philosophy and a lack of appreciation of the full measure of his contribution to American letters.(27) However, even Astro has not recognized Ricketts' influence on the theme of moral ambiguity. As Steinbeck grew to know Ricketts better, he seems to have infused his work with more and more of Ed's own sense of hopefulness for mankind while rejecting still other aspects of Ricketts' philosophy, such as his dislike of religion and its sometimes hypocritical stances.(28) However, while Ricketts' influence was important, other critics' contention that Steinbeck was philosophically a Ricketts clone are patently untrue. Astro's book delineates first of all Ricketts' belief in breaking through, in destroying the stagnation caused by stereotyping and belief in absolutes. Ricketts affirmed

that the philosopher cannot hope to explain the many contradictions in the world unless he is inextricably involved in them...Rather, his is a philosophy of

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(27)See Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist, (Minneapolis, 1973), p.4.

(28)See James Gray, John Steinbeck, (Minneapolis, Minn., 1971), p.45. (Gray contends here that Steinbeck's story of humankind is steadily continuing, full of passions from the past that seem familiar even in the present. They have a universality which gives them both drama and distinction.)

understanding and acceptance in which he seeks to unify experience, to relate the unrelatable so that even nonsense wears a crown of meaning.(29)

Furthermore, such a philosopher must escape

the cut-and-dried framework into which the mind is so ready to force everything that it experiences. The whole picture should be stressed, [rather], because too often (in zoology as in other fields) what are thought of as disciplines operate chiefly as biases--prescribed ways of thinking and of doing, into which the professional may retreat when shocked or challenged by some anomaly.(30)

In short, the philosopher must strive to break through to an inner coherency of feeling which enables him to tie together apparently unrelated pictures and see that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Yet despite Ricketts' deep concern for attaining such insight, unlike the later Steinbeck, he was very cynical about man's potential. He believed that most men were plagued with clay feet, so that only a few could achieve the "inner coherencies of both feeling and thought" and communicate their understanding of "the deep thing" which is "nameless, outside of time" and "near immortality."(31)

According to Ricketts' cynical view, most men were unlucky and could never "break through" on their own. Yet Ricketts had great hopes for fiction writers as communicators of such insights, and so, logically, he became close friends with Steinbeck, whom he considered capable and worthy of the task of communicating his words of insight to others.

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(29)Astro, p.28.

(30)Astro, p.29.

(31)Astro, p.37.

Essentially, Ricketts believed that writers who are charged with delivering the message fall into four successive growth stages. However, he dismissed the first three types of writers because they fail to really see or "break through." According to Ricketts, those in the first stage have axiomatic definitions of right and wrong, while the second stage concentrates only on bewailing man's fate and the confusion which moral problems cause. Finally, the third stage only catches glimpses of the potential of fallen man. Ricketts recognized that Steinbeck, at this point in his career, had already matured beyond stage one and stage two and had realized the benefits of moving beyond what is right and wrong to an acceptance of what is.(32) He now hoped that his friend could reach the fourth plateau where the ultimate and best writers discover that

"There is no right and wrong, all things are 'right' including both right and wrong; and there are no clay feet although the poet will know deeply about the things we called clay feet"...[Eventually he will also] achieve a "creative synthesis," "an emergent viewpoint" as [he lives] into the whole and know[s] that "'it's right, it's alright,' the 'good,' the 'bad,' whatever is." (33)

Such non-teleological "is" thinking has been characteristically associated with Steinbeck's post-Ricketts work, but most critics have been confused by the lack of rigid adherence to the philosophy. These critics fail to see the adaptation Steinbeck made from his friend's viewpoint. Such

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(32)Astro, pp.37-40.

(33)Astro, p.41.

modification rejected the absolute and instead, took the positive points of non-teleology and applied them to fiction writing.

I believe that Ricketts helped Steinbeck to see the flaws of his early work and to remedy his fiction accordingly. For example, Ricketts advised Steinbeck that "'The good writer...must tell lies to show the truth. But he must lie only to his reader, not to himself.'"(34) Consequently, Steinbeck began to see how his first novel, Cup of Gold, might be improved. His symbolism needed to be concerned with substance not with preachiness. At this time Steinbeck suddenly realized that allegory was a form of preaching, and the only people who preached were those who were unsure of their beliefs. As a non-teleological thinker, he also became aware that scientists cannot preach their truths; they must let the evidence they compile, based on their experiences and observations, and untainted by human manipulation, speak for them.(35) He also realized that he did not need to reject his moral, fabulistic and allegorical tendencies. Instead he needed to cloak them in discretion and to allow the symbols to express the feeling. By using truly non-teleological writing, Steinbeck would avoid interpretation and let the reader "break through" by himself to an understanding. Kiernan's assessment of Steinbeck's new theory, as influenced by Ricketts, is

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(34)Kiernan, p.162.

(35)See Kiernan, p.162.

accurate:

A good writer must tell lies, but only to gain his reader's attention. Once he had his attention, he must then put together the evidence--through the untainted thoughts and actions of his characters--that will lead the reader to accept the inescapable truths of the human condition, and thus the truth about himself. The good writer must be a "scientist of the imagination."(36)

Influenced by biologist and environmental theorist W.C. Allen, Ricketts also believed mankind was constantly deterred from breaking through by his own self-centered view of the nature of reality. This was also a reason to adopt the theory of non-teleology. For without it, man tries to determine causation and remedy, rather than pursue "is" thinking. He fails to recognize that animals, mankind included, do things because it is what they do; it is part of their natures. Thus Ricketts deplored man's tendency to effect a cure or change when he determined that a situation was not eliciting what he would call good. He felt that in general and for the most part it was best to leave people and conditions alone, to let people be as they must be and conditions develop as they must. The pattern of nature was far too large and complex for man to comprehend, and too often changes turned out in the long run to be more destructive than constructive.(37)

Besides his philosophical influence, Ricketts' own personal life was another vivid illustration of the paradoxical facts Steinbeck observed about humanity in

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(36)Kiernan, p.162.

(37)See Benson, p.192.

himself, and no doubt this also reinforced Steinbeck's beliefs in moral ambiguity. In fact, Ed was probably a sort of living example of the theorem Steinbeck tries so often to demonstrate in his fiction--that the people condemned or looked down upon by society are often the best people.

I believe it is important to again point out that Steinbeck was hardly a slave to Ricketts, since his friend often ignored man's common human needs, overlooked moral imperatives, and downgraded the belief in a superior being or God. Steinbeck, on the other hand, always maintained a deep concern for man's blunders as a social animal and evidently felt a need to emphasize and rely on the strong religious background of his youth as he grew older and faced moral ambiguity more often. Initially, however, "is" thinking, as defined by Ricketts, led Steinbeck to a presentation of things as they were and a recording of facts rather than causation or solutions. Thus the Pastures of Heaven, completed three years after Steinbeck's friendship with Ricketts began, is largely fatalistic and pessimistic. It takes no stance on man's responsibility, needs or moral values. In fact, Ricketts' initial idea was for Steinbeck "to use it [the novel] as a fictional framework to debunk the dependence of most people on religious and mythological belief--another topic they had discussed at length."(38) Nevertheless, in spite of his own

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(38)Kiernan, p.164.



problems as a youth and the negative influence of Ricketts about religion, the increasingly expansive Steinbeck was unable to maintain such a dark and gloomy world view. Although "is" thinking and fatalistic objectivity pervades much of The Long Valley written in 1938, in the succeeding works, an inherent optimism returns that is much stronger than that found in Pastures of Heaven or To a God Unknown.

I believe that Astro is correct when he maintains that Steinbeck culled out the best from Ricketts' philosophy, always retaining

the broad view, the sensitive insight of the acute, sympathetic observer, and he developed in his writing a series of remedies for the evils he saw in the world and thereby added fresh truths in the endeavor.(39)

Thus Steinbeck succeeded in veiling his teleology in non-teleology. Consequently, the works of his middle period are among his best since they do contain a message of morality and an insight into man's inner being. However, neither calls attention to itself; rather, the subtlety of the presentation lets the message creep up on the reader rather than assault him deliberately. In this way, Steinbeck expanded Ricketts' concept of non-teleology by observing that man is not a creature of an unknowable pattern of existence, but, by being able to realize his cosmic identity, he becomes potentially all things...a two-legged paradox who has never become

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(39)Astro, p.43.

accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness. By "breaking through" man can discover his own identity as well as his relationship with the world and thus reach a self-realization of his paradoxical condition. As Steinbeck says in The Log from The Sea of Cortez,

Perhaps, as has been suggested, his species is not set, has not jelled, but is still in a state of becoming, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness (The Log from The Sea of Cortez, p.98).

Though Ricketts advocated a hands-off (what will be, will be) approach to living, I believe that Steinbeck's growth as an individual suggested to him that this was an insufficient goal. Man, by virtue of his conscious mind, can do more than merely survive; he can, through the use of a "keying-in device," come to learn of his identity as an integral part of the cosmic design and, on the basis of this knowledge, act responsibly for the good of the whole.

As Steinbeck began Dissonant Symphony, an eventually unpublished novel, he attempted to weave his theme of disparity and duality in a harmonic whole. The intense struggle this involved required a movement from dark psychology and depression to maintaining a positive commitment and a passionate belief in man's potential and possibilities even in the face of his ultimate defeat. Perhaps this is why the novel never reached the publication stage, though it is evident that it occupied a great deal of Steinbeck's time.

However, the following works, Of Mice and Men (1937), The Long Valley (1938), and The Grapes of Wrath, (1939) do attempt to maintain the tenuous balance of opposing forces in man's life and to assert that man does have positive potential. Thus, despite the fact that Of Mice and Men was originally titled Something That Happened, I believe there is an inherent optimism which pervades the work and which balances out the evil which daily faces Lenny and George. Steinbeck here succeeds in a realistic portrayal of what "is," while leaving the "why" and "how" up to his readers. In this case, however, I believe he does not suggest the earlier bleak fatalism but rather tries to see potential good in man's realization of his dual nature.

After Steinbeck's experiences in the late 1930's and 1940's, such objectivity and detachment, however, became harder and harder to maintain. The encounters Steinbeck made with the social fabric of the depression and the living conditions in southern California and Mexico in addition to the observations he made as a war correspondent in Europe during World War II must have continued to convince Steinbeck that complete non-teleology was a flawed vision. I believe he came to accept the fact that there were indeed causes and cures and that man inherently asks why and attempts to better himself.

I also believe that, as Steinbeck matured, he attained clearer understanding of the fact that complete

non-teleological thinking rejects spiritual goals and free will and is largely mechanistic and deterministic. As he grew older, this fatalistic aspect of non-teleology began to conflict with Steinbeck's increasing desire to see the positive potential of man as well as the possibility of a divine Providence. Despite the fact that he saw man as a small speck in an indifferent universe, Steinbeck persisted in believing in a constantly evolving process of life and in progress for mankind. If, as Steinbeck contended, life is

"like a long dark tunnel with a promising flicker of light at the end, where man might reach at last the peace that passeth all understanding... still it is all we have, and in it man must wage an "endless war against weakness and despair."(40)

As Steinbeck himself said, "The only light we have is the light we create for ourselves by our courage, compassion, and love."(41)

Thus, despite an outward commitment to non-teleology, Steinbeck in mid-career presents his reading public with characters who discover that life is largely a matter of learning. In fact, his seemingly detached protagonists in his most productive period all discover, "break through" or "key in" to their duality and acknowledge it. Danny in Tortilla Flat, Tom Joad and Jim Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, George in Of Mice and Men, Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, and Kino in The Pearl all reach an understanding they have previously

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(40)Benson, p.250.

(41)Benson, p.250.

lacked, and their intuition makes them better individuals as a result of it. Perhaps they do not become "better" people, but they are wiser. They have accepted their duality and are aware of its effect on their lives.

It seems to me that Steinbeck's major concern in this productive period of writing was with the symbol of man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself. As he wrote to George Albee,

"But man hates something in himself. He has been able to defeat every natural obstacle but himself he cannot win over unless he kills every individual. And this self-hate which goes so closely in hand with self-love is what I wrote about" (A Life in Letters, p.98).

Moreover, I feel that during this time period (until about 1942), Steinbeck attempts to combine what Astro calls "cosmic idealism" with "empirical realism designed to meet contemporary social needs." (42)

Yet eventually even this compromise was to prove unsatisfactory. Already in 1939 The Grapes of Wrath posited some suggestions for moral actions and made some judgments about the "rightness" of "what is." Following this, beginning with The Moon is Down (1942), The Wayward Bus (1947), and Burning Bright (1950), Steinbeck's canon became increasingly preoccupied with morality and moral issues, sometimes to the point of overemphasis. Although he still was aware of paradox, he increasingly became concerned with the "why" of

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(42)Astro, p.131.

happenings. He found, as Warren French notes, "that a development of consciousness must be accompanied by an equal development of conscience."(43)

Around this time his own personal life was in turmoil due to his impending divorce from his second wife, and I believe his writing became more and more an outlet for working through the terrible depression he suffered. By expressing his hope and positive attitude in his novels, he was able to buoy himself up. If there was only "what is," Steinbeck's outlook could only be bleak, and his hopes down. But with a religious teleology he could dismiss the deterministic and fatalistic theories of life and continue living with hope for a better tomorrow. His work became a "summation of all his conflicts and contradictions, and all that he had learned. It was Steinbeck--funny and deadly serious at the same time, sentimental and coldly deterministic, loving and satirical, lyrical and yet very precise."(44) But more and more his work began to assert the impossibility of breaking man's spirit permanently. The non-teleologist was developing a teleology, and a religious one at that. Yet despite this burgeoning philosophy of positivism, Steinbeck still attempted to veil his moral messages (really warnings) in fiction. The Christian background of his early upbringing, summarily

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(43)Warren French, John Steinbeck, 2nd rev. ed., (New York, 1975), p.165.

(44)Benson, p.554.

dismissed in his adolescence and younger years, was now resurfacing and becoming an obvious concern rather than a subtle one. As he said to Jules Buck in Paris, "Here, I'm giving you the source material for all stories (a Bible). You'll have no problems after this." (45) More and more, Steinbeck shaped what he had come in contact with (the truth) and modified it (the lie) in order to attain an artistic end: however, the modifications were no longer slight, and Steinbeck felt compelled to advance his viewpoint in a less subtle manner. Despite his belief that books of philosophy invariably fall on deaf ears, he began to shout his viewpoint rather than incorporate it into his material. Kiernan notes this discrepancy in Steinbeck's actions and words by citing this quote: "You cannot tell people how they should feel, act and think," [and Steinbeck realized that], "unless you can enforce what you tell them." Kiernan then proceeds to speculate on Steinbeck's goal in fiction. That was the trouble with philosophy and religion, and why criminal and civil law were needed in society. People only learn about themselves by experiencing themselves. The only effective revelation was self-revelation. Great fiction provided people with the opportunity to experience themselves through their identification with characters and events. He [Steinbeck] did not want to tell people what they should be. He wanted only

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(45)Benson, p.710.

to enlighten them about what they are. Through such self-discovery, they would then have the chance of becoming what they ought to be. If nothing else, this was the superiority of fiction over philosophy and religion and the social sciences.(46) Yet, despite this conviction that self-discovery was most important, I believe Steinbeck was unable to resist his natural bent as fabulist/moralist. Thus, there is some validity, albeit minor, to the complaints of didacticism in the later works.

Ricketts' death in 1948 removed the intellectual commitment to non-teleology, and Steinbeck became more and more dedicated to allegory, fable and parable - his goal being "to resolve the eternal transcendentalist paradox: that man must be both self-fulfilling and selfless at the same time...that by working to realize one's individual potential, one serves not only oneself but mankind as well."(47) Steinbeck also came to recognize "that despite the truth of (philosopher Jan) Smuts' dictum that 'purpose is the highest, most important activity of the free, creative mind,' in America, this sense of purpose has made us a nation of vipers."(48) Steinbeck intensely believed that his fellow citizens needed to be reminded again and again of moral ambiguity and consequently his thematic emphasis became more

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(46)See Kiernan, p.215.

(47)Kiernan, p.292.

(48)Astro, p.168.



obvious. Yet despite this didacticism, I believe the complexity of Steinbeck's symbolism and his craft with words remain factors which redeem the minor flaws of this period.

Although what he saw in his own life and in postwar America strongly mitigated against his lofty philosophical idealism, he continued to sound the alarm, so to speak, "exhorting man to choose goodness over evil, or...lamenting the inevitable demise of the good man in a corrupt world."(49)

As Todd Lieber notes,

At the heart of Steinbeck's work is a conviction that the writing most worth doing is that which can penetrate to the sources of human thought and behavior and present in the form of some objective correlative the archetypal and mythopoetic knowledge that lies deep in the mystery of human existence.(50)

After the so-called World War II propaganda novel, The Moon is Down, Steinbeck began work on the moral allegory, The Wayward Bus. This less than carefully crafted work celebrated the potential of Everyman to overcome the seven Deadly Sins and move from Rebel Corners to San Juan de la Cruz (St. John of the Cross)(51); then he produced what he considered his master work, East of Eden. This epic saga of America rejoiced in the fortunate fall, and in restored-man's ability to choose good over evil (timshel). Finally Steinbeck wrote Burning

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(49)Astro, p.169.

(50)Todd M. Lieber, "Talismanic Patterns in the Novels of John Steinbeck," American Literature, XLIV (1972), pp.274-275.

(51)See Peter Lisca, John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth, (New York, 1978), for an extensive explanation of the symbolic nature of this novel.

Bright, a play in which he tried to produce a universal story with a universal language. Based on the paradox described in William Blake's poem, "The Tiger," it exulted in the miracle of life - that despite man's cruelty, violence, and weakness, the race goes staggering on.

Our dear race, born without courage but very brave, born with a flickering intelligence and yet with beauty in its hands...With all our horrors and our faults, somewhere in us there is a shining. That is the most important of all facts. There is a shining." (52)

Of these three novels, only East of Eden was a popular success, and a frustrated Steinbeck acknowledged that the other two works suffered from a lack of careful crafting and revision. He did not, however, admit to the contention of the critics that his work was becoming less interesting as he continued to stress stories with deep allegorical meaning. Instead, he was stunned by criticism which accused him of "grandiloquent themes, mechanical people, and false, sentimental, and banal concepts of life." (53) Yet despite his excesses in proclaiming the moral responsibility of mankind, I believe that Steinbeck never makes "good" and "evil," "right" and "wrong", into moral absolutes, as some critics contend. (54) Instead, he acknowledges duality, and hopes in spite of it. Frustrated by a lack of understanding in his

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(52) John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, (New York, 1962), pp.110-111.

(53) Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity, (New York, 1958), p.154.

(54) See Astro, p.209.

readers and the heavy condemnation leveled by critics on his "moral" lessons, Steinbeck may have allowed his later works to become heavy-handed, the production of an author who pounds away at his message as if he fears that if the meaning is not shouted or reiterated again and again, the reader will miss the point. However, even in this stage of moral preaching and fiction, Steinbeck continued to describe the tension between polar opposites of action.

In fact, Steinbeck's moral concerns were intensified, and a short time later they led him to begin what for him was a project of great import, a translation of Malory's Morte de Arthur. According to close associates, Steinbeck spoke of the Arthurian legend in terms of its symbolism of the recurrent need in times of confusion and doubt for moral authority and direction. He talked of its meaning for men today, of the everlasting struggle between simple goodness and clever evil, and the hunger for purity and ennobling purposes after intervals of corruption of the spirit of man.(55)

This moral concern for an increasingly immoral America was to continue even though Steinbeck was unable to finish his translation. At its best, it surfaces in the final novels, The Winter of Our Discontent, and the autobiographical travelogue, Travels With Charley. But once again the early pessimism of Steinbeck returns along with the moral warning.

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(55)See Astro, p.212.

Although hope is present in both of these works, it is dim. Both the novel and travelogue concentrate on a sin-sick society that upsets the novelist and for which he has no specific solution. As Astro notes:

There are occasional glimpses of hope in The Winter of Our Discontent, particularly at the end of the book when Ethan struggles to avoid compromising with the adulterated society in which he lives... [But] The end of [Winter] also seems to indicate that Steinbeck the moralist had run out of steam.(56)

Although for a decade [Steinbeck] had steadfastly refused to chant the destruction of man's spirit, the later works seem to return to the dark pessimism of his early career. Despite this cyclical return to the past, Astro notes that

unlike so many of his contemporaries, Steinbeck never totally gave up on the world, and he always regarded himself as a novelist of affirmation. But particularly in his later novels, the search for paradise is combined with the opposite theme of paradise lost which creates irreconcilable contradictions. It is only in selected instances that he shows man mastering his inner and outer conflicts and achieving a paradise of the mind and heart.(57)

In most works, however, moral ambiguity dominates. As Benson states, "His was not the traditional New England-Puritan split of the antagonism between good and evil, but rather a complementary split between the natural and the ideal, between the material and the spiritual."(58) Ultimately, Steinbeck was forced to reject the relative importance of man. Too often such a view created blinders which prevented mankind from

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(56)Astro, p.215.

(57)Astro, p.223.

(58)Benson, p.646.

truly knowing his dilemma. Instead he urged his readers "Not to see man at the center of the universe struggling with good and evil, but instead, to see him through non-teleological glasses as a special kind of animal that may survive only if he adapts."(59) By deriding his countrymen for follies and corruptions, and always for the old reasons: for blindness, predilection for nonsense, failure to perceive relations and intuit the whole, Steinbeck's goal was to enhance and to encourage such adaptation. "Why are we lost in a cloud of nonsense?" asks Steinbeck. "I think it is because we see it only a little bit at a time, and don't relate it to the whole."(60)

To Steinbeck, reading books was a way of relating to the whole. In literary communication, pieces of the puzzle could be placed together and a relationship established. "What kind of books? Any kind--poetry, essays, novels, and plays. But they must show us as we are, both the good and the bad. 'The moment it is all good, it is automatically propaganda and will be disbelieved.'" (61) Unfortunately, however, many critics have missed the tension provided by moral ambiguity and have concluded exactly what Steinbeck feared--that a once quality author had deteriorated into a propagandist. Nonetheless, Steinbeck seems to have weathered the misunderstanding quite

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(59)Benson, p.649.

(60)Astro, p.224.

(61)Benson, p.802.

well. Benson's summary of Steinbeck's attitude is, I feel, very accurate.

Steinbeck had learned, at last, to like himself well enough to speak as himself and to project a possible version of Steinbeck based on what he actually was, as well as what he would wish to be or become. In both Winter and Charley he is saying in effect, it seems to me: "This is what I am, both as I see myself and as I see the possibilities in myself. These are the things I do or could do; these are the thoughts I think or could think. You may find them strange, or funny, or false--but I am not going to be afraid to be truthful, to be corny or sentimental, if that is what I am. My aim is to reach the deepest truth available to the novelist, not the truth of proverbs, axioms, or generalizations, but the truth that all novelists must aim for and the only truth they are really qualified or able to present--the truth of my apprehension of life as I have experienced it."(62)

According to Benson, Steinbeck's flaw, if it can be called that, is that "he himself became more and more loving as a person throughout the decade of the fifties, a quality accentuated by the increasingly more personal direction of his writing, both fiction and nonfiction." Consequently, "For some, this quality of love and affection has made his work more valuable, giving it depth, reality, and power. For others, however, the quality has been absolutely nauseating and has inspired an almost unbelievable amount of hostility."(63) Yet despite possible negative reaction by readers and/or critics, Steinbeck's accomplishments, even his final works, Winter and Charley, present a sharp one-two punch

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(62)Benson, p.830.

(63)Benson, p.874, Levant, p.7, and Lisca, "Steinbeck's Image of Man and His Decline as a Writer," Modern Fiction Studies, XI (Spring, 1965), p.10.

of moral vision and experimentation. His literary production shows versatility and unpredictability as is evidenced in his success in many genres and his risk-taking in experimental forms. As Benson queries, "What other writer of his time had been able to touch America's soul in both the thirties and the sixties?" (64)

Although his letter to Mrs. John Kennedy on February 25, 1964, was in reference to the recently deceased president, perhaps his own words describe his contribution to American literary thought.

The 15th century and our own have so much in common--loss of authority, loss of gods, loss of heroes, and loss of lovely pride. When such a hopeless muddled need occurs, it does seem to me that the hungry hearts of men distill their best and truest essence, and that essence becomes a man, and that man a hero so that all men can be reassured that such things are possible...At our best we live by the legend. And when our belief gets pale and weak, there comes a man out of our need who puts on the shining armor and everyone living reflects a little of that light, yes, and stores some up against the time when he is gone....

In our time of meager souls, of mole-like burrowing into a status quo which never existed, the banner of the Legend is the great vocation (A Life in Letters, pp.792-793).

Steinbeck here perceives himself as the creator of dreams and the potential of dreams. His "heroic" works are means by which man can rejuvenate his hope for the future. Encouraged by Steinbeck's characters and his message, his reader can become the St. John of Steinbeck's Nobel acceptance speech, whose "word" reaches out to reform and refashion his beloved

America. Certainly Steinbeck's advocates among the critics would agree. As Pascal Covici stated in a letter to Steinbeck on February 12, 1958,

When I look back at the long list of your books I am truly astounded. And if you don't write another book, you have written your name in American literature for as long as the human race can read. For you, too, have the poetry, the compassion, the laughter and tears we find in Cervantes, and Dickens and Mark Twain. A reading of your work will always add something new to one's imagination and will always have something to say.(65)

President Lyndon Johnson also reaffirmed Covici's assessment when he wrote Steinbeck, "As usual, John, you go to the heart of the matter and that is what truly counts."(66)

Steinbeck's "heart of the matter," moral ambiguity, is still a current dilemma, as Charles Krauthammer's Time essay, "The Moral Equivalent of Right and Wrong," points out. Krauthammer acknowledges that "there are moral distinctions to be made; but there seems to be a growing unwillingness--or is it an inability?-- to make them, even the most simple."(67)

Classifying this inability as the A.I.D.S. of the intellectuals: an acquired immune deficiency syndrome, Krauthammer further contends that "moral blindness of this caliber requires practice. It has to be learned."(68) Indeed, a majority of modern day men suffer from world weariness.

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(65)Covici as quoted in Benson, p.961.

(66)Benson, p.994.

(67)Charles Krauthammer, "The Moral Equivalent of Right and Wrong," Time, CXXIV (July 9, 1984), p.87.

(68)Krauthammer, p.88.



"And when easy distinctions become even too much, the hard ones become intolerable. It is moral exhaustion, an abdication of the responsibility to distinguish between shades of gray. The usual excuse is that the light has grown pale; the real problem is the glaze in the eye of the beholder."(69)

Consequently, Steinbeck's persistent struggles to maintain the light, to pass it on to the next generation distinguishes him from other writers who ingeniously juggled the subject of high ideals and low practice. Their "poise in ambivalence" has been analyzed by Gary Lindberg in The Confidence Man in American Literature and is part of what Krauthammer identifies as the real problem. He concludes that more authors who are concerned with morals are needed.

The cause of moral confusion is the state of language itself, language that has been bleached of its moral distinctions, turned neutral, value-free, "non-judgmental." When that happens, moral discourse becomes difficult, moral distinctions impossible, and moral debate incomprehensible.(70)

Steinbeck's refusal to blur moral distinctions has endeared him to readers who believe that choices need to be made. They may not be clear-cut or obvious and at times the "right" choice may backfire, but mankind dare not abdicate from the process. As Steinbeck wrote to John O'Hara,

Unless we can preserve and foster the principle of the preciousness of the individual mind, the world of men will either disintegrate into a screaming chaos or will go into a grey slavery. And that fostering and preservation seem to me our greatest job (A Life in Letters, p.360).

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(69)Krauthammer, p.87.

(70)Krauthammer, p.88.

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