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QUALIFICATION WORK

**to obtain Bachelor's Degree on Specialty 5120100 – English
Philology on theme
*“Analysis Of Compositional Features Of Novels By John Steinbeck”***

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INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck's status as a major American author would be secure if he had written no book other than *The Grapes of Wrath*, his huge, extensive, bright, and moving account of a simple Oklahoma farm family displaced, along with hundreds of thousands of others, from their land during the disastrous drought that made the Great Depression of the 1930s a doubly devastating period. Yet although Steinbeck's works were often turned into influential films and his books remain widely read, he has never been accorded quite the same level of critical respect bestowed on such contemporaries as Ernest Hemingway or William Faulkner. He remains a writer whose reputation was somewhat hurt by his very popularity.

Steinbeck is acclaimed for his using unusual techniques in writing his novels. Steinbeck uses a variety of writing techniques in his novels to enhance his presentation. One of them is his somewhat poetic descriptions of nature. Steinbeck uses different styles of writing and themes and explores human nature, the problems of society in his novels. He also uses imagery and prototypes of real life persons to characterize his heroes.

The Grapes of Wrath is an American epic, but in addition to composing that significant and popular book Steinbeck authored *Of Mice and Men* (a brief novel about loneliness that is almost a drama in prose), *The Pearl* (a lyrical but tragic parable about a modern-day loss of innocence), and a number of short stories that are considered among his country's finest.

Steinbeck also, of course, wrote much else during the course of a long and prolific career, and during that career he was showered with

prizes, awards, and recognitions—a trend that culminated in his being awarded, in 1962, the Nobel Prize in literature.

Topicality of the theme. As we mentioned above the Steinbeck is recognized as one of the writers who could write the real novel. His heritage in American and world literature remains indisputable for about half a century. His contribution to the art of word by describing common American people and their lives, their external worlds and desires is considered as a contribution to the American Novel of the 20th Century. Thus, studying his novels, their artistic and compositional peculiarities is of great importance for the people who is interested in American Literature and English language.

The aim of the work is to hand down an opinion about the common features of John Steinbeck's novels.

According to the main aim of the work following **tasks** were to be solved during the research:

- study the relevant literature and materials about John Steinbeck's biography;
 - investigate the status of John Steinbeck as a novel writer among other writers of American Novel;
 - read and study the famous novels of John Steinbeck, namely: "The Grapes of Wrath", "Of Mice and Men", and "The Red Pony";
 - study and analyse the plot, structure, thematic content of the novels;
- find features which are common to John Steinbeck's novels.

Novelty of the work. The research that we have done has many new approaches to the study of Steinbeck's novels. The novels of Steinbeck were analyzed from different points of view in the given qualification paper. In studying the characteristic features of the author's novels their plot, reception of the novels by the reader, characters and thematic

content of the novels, and their structure were carefully studied in order to find the characteristic features of Steinbeck's novelistic art.

Practical value of the work. The results of the research work, materials, and overview of literature dedicated to the life and literary career of Steinbeck can be used in studying the history of the 20th Century American Literature. Results brought in the paper can also be used by the students in compiling their self-independent works, during the seminars and course works. The research results given in the qualification paper will be of great importance in clarifying the status of John Steinbeck in the 20th Century American Literature.

The object and methods of investigation. The object of our study is John Steinbeck and novels.

Methods used in the given qualification paper are as follows: in order to compare the works of Steinbeck with his contemporaries and his other works the method of comparative analysis was used, during the study of related materials given in other than English languages the method of translation was used, in order to understand the compositional specifications of Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" the method of literary analysis was applied and in writing the conclusions and revealing the features of John Steinbeck's creativity descriptive methods of investigating literature was successfully used.

Scientific scrutiny of the research. In studying the biography and creative life of John Steinbeck and his novels we worked with many references and materials given in the internet.

Among them we may mention:

Crumbley P. Student's Encyclopaedia of the Great American Writers. The book gives detailed information on writers of American literature and Theodore Dreiser is among them.

Hamilton Geoff. Encyclopaedia of Popular Fiction. The reference contains valuable materials on the fiction of American literature especially the works of twentieth century American literature.

Mathews John T. A Companion to the Modern American Novel is a book about contemporary American novel and the problems depicted in the American literature of the 20th century. The book also contains several considerations on Steinbeck's critical reputation.

Pizer Donald. The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism. As we all know John Steinbeck was one of the brightest representatives of American realism in Literature.

Skipp E. Francis. American Literature. The book gives a detailed but short overview on many authors of the 20th century American literature.

The Structure of the qualification paper. The paper consists of introduction, two chapters, conclusion and bibliography.

The first chapter of the main part is about the life and literary career of John Steinbeck as a novelist and gives the detailed study of his works and critical reputation.

The second chapter is dedicated to the study of his three widely acclaimed novels: "The Grapes of Wrath", "Of Mice and Men" and "The Red Pony".

Conclusions and results of the work done are clearly summarized in the Conclusion part of the paper.

The Bibliography contains the list of more than 50 items which were used in the course of carrying out the research work and writing the qualification paper.

CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW. BIOGRAPHY AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF JOHN STEINBECK

1.1 John Steinbeck's Life and His Entrance to the Art of Literature

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. was born on February 27, 1902, in Salinas, California. He was of German and Irish descent. Johann Adolf Großsteinbeck, Steinbeck's paternal grandfather, had shortened the family name to Steinbeck when he immigrated to the United States. The family farm in Heiligenhaus, Germany, is still today named "Großsteinbeck¹."

His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, served as Monterey County treasurer. John's mother, Olive Hamilton, a former school teacher, shared Steinbeck's passion of reading and writing. Steinbeck lived in a small rural town that was essentially a frontier settlement, set amid some of the world's most fertile land. He spent his summers working on nearby ranches and later with migrant workers on Spreckels ranch. He became aware of the harsher aspects of migrant life and the darker side of human nature, which material expressed in such works as *Of Mice and Men*. He also explored his surroundings, walking across local forests, fields, and farms.

In 1919, Steinbeck graduated from Salinas High School and attended Stanford University intermittently until 1925, eventually leaving without a degree. He travelled to New York City and held odd jobs while pursuing his dream of becoming a writer².

When he failed to get his work published, he returned to California and worked for a time in 1928 as a tour guide and caretaker at the fish

¹ An Introduction to American Literature. "Time present and time past". Francoise Grellet. – Hachette Supérieur. 1993. – 206 p.

² Blake Hobby. Student's Encyclopaedia of Great American Writers. Volume III. – Facts on File, 2010. – 421 p.

hatchery in Tahoe City, where he would meet tourist Carol Henning, his future first wife. Steinbeck and Henning were married in January 1930.

For most of the Great Depression and his marriage to Carol, Steinbeck lived in a cottage that was owned by his father in Pacific Grove, California, on the Monterey Peninsula a few blocks from the border of the city of Monterey, California. The elder Steinbeck supplied him with the lodging for free, with paper for his manuscripts, and critical loans beginning at the end of 1928 which allowed Steinbeck to give up a punishing warehouse job in San Francisco, and focus on his craft¹.

After the publication of his Monterey novel *Tortilla Flat* in 1935, his first clear novelistic success, the Steinbecks emerged from relative poverty and built a summer ranch-home in Los Gatos. In 1940, Steinbeck went on a voyage around the Gulf of California with his influential friend Ed Ricketts, to collect biological specimens. The *Log from the Sea of Cortez* describes his experiences. Although Carol accompanied Steinbeck on the trip, their marriage was beginning to suffer by this time, and would effectively end in 1941, even as Steinbeck worked on the manuscript for the book.

In March, 1943, Steinbeck's divorce from Carol became final and later that month he married Gwyndolyn "Gwyn" Conger. With his second wife Steinbeck had his only children—Thomas ("Thom") Myles Steinbeck born 1944 and John Steinbeck IV (1946–1991)².

In 1943, Steinbeck served as a World War II war correspondent. Steinbeck accompanied the commando raids of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.'s Beach Jumpers program, which launched small-unit diversion operations against German-held islands in the Mediterranean. In 1944, wounded by a

¹ Blake Hobby. *Student's Encyclopaedia of Great American Writers*. Volume III. – Facts on File, 2010. – 421 p.

² Dean Curry, General Series Editor. *Highlights of American literature*. - University of Maryland. Washington, D.C., 1995. – 456 p.

close munitions explosion in North Africa, the war-weary author resigned from his work and returned home.

In 1947, Steinbeck made the first of many trips to the Soviet Union, this one with renowned photographer Robert Capa. They visited Moscow, Kiev, Tbilisi, Batumi and Stalingrad, becoming some of the first Westerners to visit many parts of the USSR since the communist revolution. Steinbeck's book about their experiences, *A Russian Journal*, was illustrated with Capa's photos. In 1948, the year the book was published, Steinbeck was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters¹.

In May, 1948 Steinbeck travelled to California on an emergency trip to be with his closest friend Ed Ricketts, who had been seriously injured when his car was struck by a train. Ricketts died hours before Steinbeck arrived. On returning home from this devastating trip, Steinbeck was confronted by Gwyn, who told him she wanted a divorce for various reasons related to estrangement. She could not be dissuaded, and the divorce became final in August of that same year. Steinbeck spent the year after Ricketts' death in deep depression, by his own account².

In June, 1949, Steinbeck met stage-manager Elaine Scott at a restaurant in Carmel, California. Steinbeck and Scott eventually began a relationship and in December, 1950, Steinbeck and Scott married, within a week of the finalizing of Scott's own divorce from actor Zachary Scott. This third marriage for Steinbeck lasted until Steinbeck's death in 1968.

In 1966, Steinbeck travelled to Tel Aviv to visit the site of Mount Hope, a farm community established in Israel by his grandfather, whose

¹ Dean Curry, General Series Editor. *Highlights of American literature*. - University of Maryland. Washington, D.C., 1995. - 456 p.

² Ditsky, John, ed. *Critical Essays on Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*. - Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989. - 239 p. // <http://www.books.google.com>

brother, Friedrich Grosssteinbeck, was murdered by Arab marauders in 1858¹.

John Steinbeck died in New York City on December 20, 1968 of heart disease and congestive heart failure. He was 66, and had been a life-long smoker. An autopsy showed nearly complete occlusion of the main coronary arteries.

In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated, and an urn containing his ashes was eventually interred (March 4, 1969) at the Hamilton family gravesite at Garden of Memories Memorial Park in Salinas, with those of his parents and maternal grandparents. His third wife, Elaine, was buried in the plot in 2004. He had earlier written to his doctor that he felt deeply "in his flesh" that he would not survive his physical death, and that the biological end of his life was the final end to it.

Steinbeck's first novel, *Cup of Gold*, published in 1929, is based on the life and death of privateer Henry Morgan. It centers on Morgan's assault and sacking of the city of Panama, sometimes referred to as the 'Cup of Gold', and on the woman, fairer than the sun, who was said to be found there².

After *Cup of Gold*, between 1931 and 1933 Steinbeck produced three shorter works. *The Pastures of Heaven*, published in 1932, comprised twelve interconnected stories about a valley near Monterey, that was discovered by a Spanish corporal while chasing runaway American Indian slaves. In 1933 Steinbeck published *The Red Pony*, a 100-page, four-chapter story weaving in memories of Steinbeck's childhood. *To a God Unknown* follows the life of a homesteader and his

¹ Ditsky, John, ed. *Critical Essays on Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*. – Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989. – 239 p. // <http://www.books.google.com>

² Donahue, Agness McNeill, ed. *A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Crowell, 1968.
French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 499–527. New York: Norton, 1973.

family in California, depicting a character with a primal and pagan worship of the land he works.

Steinbeck achieved his first critical success with the novel *Tortilla Flat* (1935), which won the California Commonwealth Club's Gold Medal. The book portrays the adventures of a group of classless and usually homeless young men in Monterey after World War I, just before U.S. prohibition. The characters, who are portrayed in ironic comparison to mythic knights on a quest, reject nearly all the standard mores of American society in enjoyment of a dissolute life centered around wine, lust, camaraderie and petty theft. The book was made into the 1942 film *Tortilla Flat*, starring Spencer Tracy, Hedy Lamarr and John Garfield, a friend of Steinbeck's¹.

Steinbeck began to write a series of "California novels" and Dust Bowl fiction, set among common people during the Great Depression. These included *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. *Of Mice and Men*, about the dreams of a pair of migrant laborers working the California soil, was critically acclaimed.

The stage adaptation of *Of Mice and Men* was a hit, starring Broderick Crawford as the mentally child-like but physically powerful itinerant farmhand Lennie, and Wallace Ford as Lennie's companion, "George". However, Steinbeck refused to travel from his home in California to attend any performance of the play during its New York run, telling director George S. Kaufman that the play as it existed in his own mind was "perfect" and that anything presented on stage would only be a disappointment. Steinbeck would write two more stage plays (*The Moon Is Down* and *Burning Bright*).

¹ Harmon, William, and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.
Hamilton Geoff. *Encyclopaedia of Popular Fiction*. Facts on File. 2009. – 412 p.

Of Mice and Men was rapidly adapted into a 1939 Hollywood film, in which Lon Chaney, Jr. (who had portrayed the role in the Los Angeles production of the play) was cast as Lennie and Burgess Meredith as "George." Steinbeck followed this wave of success with *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), based on newspaper articles he had written in San Francisco. The novel would be considered by many to be his finest work. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, even as it was made into a notable film directed by John Ford, starring Henry Fonda as Tom Joad, who was nominated for an Academy Award for the part¹.

The success of the novel was not free of controversy. Steinbeck's New Deal political views, negative portrayal of aspects of capitalism, and sympathy for the plight of workers, led to a backlash against the author, especially close to home. Claiming the book was both obscene and misrepresented conditions in the county, the Kern County Board of Supervisors banned the book from the county's publicly funded schools and libraries in August 1939. This ban lasted until January 1941.

Of the controversy, Steinbeck wrote, "The vilification of me out here from the large landowners and bankers is pretty bad. The latest is a rumor started by them that the Okies hate me and have threatened to kill me for lying about them. I'm frightened at the rolling might of this damned thing. It is completely out of hand; I mean a kind of hysteria about the book is growing that is not healthy."

The film versions of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* (by two different movie studios) were in production simultaneously, allowing Steinbeck to spend a full day on the set of *The Grapes of Wrath* and the next day on the set of *Of Mice and Men*.

¹ Gantt P. Student's Encyclopaedia of the Great American Writers. – Facts on File, 2010. – 465 p. Introduction to Literature. Second Edition. Gilbert H. Muller, John A. Williams. Mc Graw-Hill, Inc. 1995. pp. 3-7.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Ed Ricketts strongly influenced Steinbeck's writing. Steinbeck frequently took small trips with Ricketts along the California coast to give Steinbeck time off from his writing and to collect biological specimens, which Ricketts sold for a living. Their joint book about a collecting expedition to the Gulf of California in 1940, which was part travelogue and part natural history, published just as the U.S. entered World War II, never found an audience and did not sell well. However, in 1951, Steinbeck republished the narrative portion of the book as *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, under his name only (though Ricketts had written some of it). This work remains in print today¹.

Ricketts was Steinbeck's model for the character of "Doc" in *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954), "Friend Ed" in *Burning Bright*, and characters in *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Ecological themes recur in Steinbeck's novels of the period².

Steinbeck's close relations with Ricketts ended in 1941 when Steinbeck moved away from Pacific Grove and divorced from his wife Carol. Ricketts' biographer Eric Enno Tamm notes that, except for *East of Eden* (1952), Steinbeck's writing declined after Ricketts' untimely death in 1948³.

His novel *The Moon is Down* (1942), about the Socrates-inspired spirit of resistance in an occupied village in northern Europe, was made into a film almost immediately. It was presumed that the unnamed country of the novel was Norway and the occupiers the Nazis, and in 1945 Steinbeck received the Haakon VII Cross of freedom for his literary contributions to the Norwegian resistance movement.

¹ Gantt P. *Student's Encyclopaedia of the Great American Writers*. – Facts on File, 2010. – 465 p.

² *Introduction to Literature*. Second Edition. Gilbert H. Muller, John A. Williams. Mc Graw-Hill, Inc. 1995. pp. 3-7

³ National Steinbeck Centre: <http://www.steinbeck.org/MainFrame.html>
<http://www.iblist.com/author.php?id=153>

In 1943, Steinbeck served as a World War II war correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and worked with the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of the CIA). It was at that time he became friends with Will Lang, Jr. of Time/Life magazine. During the war, Steinbeck accompanied the commando raids of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.'s Beach Jumpers program, which launched small-unit diversion operations against German-held islands in the Mediterranean. Some of his writings from this period were incorporated in the documentary *Once There Was a War* (1958)¹.

Steinbeck returned from the war with a number of wounds from shrapnel and some psychological trauma. He treated himself, as ever, by writing. He wrote Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (1944), and the film *A Medal for Benny* (1945) with screenwriter Jack Wagner about paisanos from Tortilla Flat going to war. He later requested that his name be removed from the credits of *Lifeboat* because he believed the final version of the film had racist undertones. In 1944, suffering from homesickness for his Pacific Grove/Monterey life of the 1930s, he also wrote *Cannery Row* (1945) which became so famous that Ocean View Avenue in Monterey, the location of the book, was eventually renamed Cannery Row in 1958².

After the end of the war, he wrote *The Pearl* (1947), already knowing it would be filmed. The story first appeared in the December 1945 issue of *Woman's Home Companion* magazine as "The Pearl of the World." It was illustrated by John Alan Maxwell. The novel is an imaginative telling of a story which Steinbeck had heard in La Paz in 1940, as related in *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*, which he described in Chapter 11 as being "so much like a parable that it almost can't be".

¹ National Steinbeck Centre: <http://www.steinbeck.org/MainFrame.html> <http://www.iblist.com/author.php?id=153>

² William Jones. Symbolism in Steinbeck's Novels <http://www.helium.com/>

Steinbeck travelled to Mexico for the filming with Wagner who helped with the script; on this trip he would be inspired by the story of Emiliano Zapata, and subsequently wrote a film script (*Viva Zapata!*) directed by Elia Kazan and starring Marlon Brando and Anthony Quinn.

Steinbeck married for the last time in 1950. Soon after, he began work on *East of Eden* (1952), which he considered his best work¹.

In 1952, John Steinbeck appeared as the on-screen narrator of 20th Century Fox's film, *O. Henry's Full House*. Although Steinbeck later admitted he was uncomfortable before the camera, he provided interesting introductions to several filmed adaptations of short stories by the legendary writer O. Henry. About the same time, Steinbeck recorded readings of several of his short stories for Columbia Records; despite some stiffness, the recordings provide a record of Steinbeck's deep, resonant voice.

Travels with Charley (subtitle: *In Search of America*) is a travelogue of his 1960 road trip with his poodle Charley. Steinbeck bemoans his lost youth and roots, while dispensing both criticism and praise for America. According to Steinbeck's son Thom, Steinbeck went on the trip because he knew he was dying and wanted to see the country one last time².

Steinbeck's last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), examines moral decline in America. The protagonist Ethan grows discontented with his own moral decline and that of those around him. The book is very different in tone from Steinbeck's amoral and ecological stance in earlier works like *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*. It was not a critical success. Many reviewers recognized the importance of the novel but were disappointed that it was not another *Grapes of Wrath*.

¹ Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1996. // www.books.google.com

² Abadi Masoud. *American Literature. Prose, Poetry, Drama*. – Microsoft Encarta. 2008. – 430 p. Bercovitch S. A. *Cambridge History of American Literature*. – Cambridge Univ. Press. 2005. – 797 p.

Apparently taken aback not only by the critical reception of this novel, but also the critical outcry when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, Steinbeck published no more fiction in the next six years before his death.

Nobel Prize

In 1962, Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for literature for his “realistic and imaginative writing, combining as it does sympathetic humor and keen social perception.” On the day of the announcement¹ (Oct. 25) when he was asked by a reporter at a press conference given by his publisher, if he thought he deserved the Nobel, he said:

"Frankly, no." In his acceptance speech later in the year in Stockholm, he said: 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. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature.

He also said in his speech, "Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope. So that today, St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased: In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man—and the Word is with Men."²

Although modest about his own talent as a writer, Steinbeck talked openly of his own admiration of certain writers. In 1953, he wrote that he considered cartoonist Al Capp, creator of the satirical *Li'l Abner*, "possibly the best writer in the world today." At his own first Nobel Prize press conference he was asked his favorite authors and works and

¹ Abadi Masoud. *American Literature. Prose, Poetry, Drama.* – Microsoft Encarta. 2008. – 430 p. Bercovitch S. A. *Cambridge History of American Literature.* – Cambridge Univ. Press. 2005. – 797 p.

² Abadi Masoud. *American Literature. Prose, Poetry, Drama.* – Microsoft Encarta. 2008. – 430 p. Bercovitch S. A. *Cambridge History of American Literature.* – Cambridge Univ. Press. 2005. – 797 p.

replied: "Hemingway's short stories and nearly everything Faulkner wrote."

In September 1964, Steinbeck was awarded the United States Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1967, at the behest of Newsday magazine, Steinbeck went to Vietnam to report on the war there. Thinking of the Vietnam War as a heroic venture, he was considered a hawk for his position on that war. His sons both served in Vietnam prior to his death, and Steinbeck visited one son in the battlefield (at one point being allowed to man a machine-gun watch position at night at a firebase, while his son and other members of his platoon slept).

After Steinbeck's death, his incomplete novel based on the King Arthur legends of Malory and others, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, was finally published in 1976.

On Feb. 27, 1979, on what would have been his 77th birthday, he was honored by being placed on a U.S. postage stamp¹.

1.2 John Steinbeck and Reception of His Works by Critics

The Grapes of Wrath is an American epic, but in addition to composing that significant and popular book Steinbeck authored *Of Mice and Men* (a brief novel about loneliness that is almost a drama in prose)², *The Pearl* (a lyrical but tragic parable about a modern-day loss of innocence), and a number of short stories that are considered among his country's finest. Steinbeck also, of course, wrote much else during the course of a long and prolific career, and during that career he was

¹ Abadi Masoud. American Literature. Prose, Poetry, Drama. – Microsoft Encarta. 2008. – 430 p. Bercovitch S. A Cambridge History of American Literature. – Cambridge Univ. Press. 2005. – 797 p.

² French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 499–527. New York: Norton, 1973.

showered with prizes, awards, and recognitions—a trend that culminated in his being awarded, in 1962, the Nobel Prize in literature. Yet although his works were often turned into influential films and his books remain widely read, he has never been accorded quite the same level of critical respect bestowed on such contemporaries as Ernest Hemingway or William Faulkner. He remains a writer whose reputation was somewhat hurt by his very popularity. Most of the details of Steinbeck's life are laid out clearly in the helpful "Chronology" compiled by Robert DeMott. Steinbeck was born on February 27, 1902, in the town of Salinas, California, to Olive Hamilton Steinbeck (who had been a teacher) and John Ernst Steinbeck, who managed a local flour mill. The Steinbecks already had two daughters (Esther and Beth) and would later add another (Mary). Young John, however, was their only boy, and he spent his early years enjoying the pleasures of nature and developing an early infatuation with books and literature. He was a good student, and already as an adolescent he had begun composing stories and sharing them with friends.

His first collection of short stories was turned down that year by a New York publisher, but Steinbeck persisted in writing, and by 1927 (after he had returned to California) he had published one story and had begun collaborating on a play. By 1928 he had completed his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, which appeared in print in August 1929. By this time, Steinbeck (who had been working a variety of jobs) had moved to San Francisco and was able to devote more time to writing, thanks to financial support from his father. Most important to Steinbeck, however, was 1930 because it was the year in which he first made the acquaintance of Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist who became a close and influential friend. Meanwhile, Steinbeck continued to write, producing an innovative short novel as well as a crime novel (neither of which was published). In

1931 he was also hard at work on a series of stories that were published in 1932 as *The Pastures of Heaven*¹.

When time permitted, Steinbeck worked on stories that eventually became part of his noted collection titled *The Red Pony*, and indeed two of them were printed in a prominent magazine by the end of the year. Meanwhile, his novel *To a God Unknown* appeared in September, by which time he was also nearly finished with the first draft of a new novel—*Tortilla Flat*—that would soon help make him famous. When his mother passed away in February 1934, Steinbeck and his wife continued to live with his father for a time, but eventually caretakers were found to look after him, thus freeing John to devote more time to his writing. During that summer he composed nine stories, most of which were later collected in *The Long Valley*, but during this time he was also working on a new novel, *In Dubious Battle*, which was based on recent labor strife in California. *Tortilla Flat* was accepted for publication in 1934, and in 1935 *In Dubious Battle* was also accepted. Unfortunately the highly successful publication of *Tortilla Flat* in May was counterbalanced by the death of the novelist's father that same month. Profits from sales of the novel allowed Steinbeck and his wife to travel to Mexico, and it was not long before film rights to the book were also sold for a substantial sum. Steinbeck, in other words, had finally begun to achieve real commercial success as a writer. *In Dubious Battle* appeared in print early in 1936, thus giving him even further visibility as an increasingly significant author.

By this time he had also begun working on one of his most famous books—*Of Mice and Men*. Unfortunately, his dog chewed up much of the manuscript, but Steinbeck was able to rewrite the piece rather quickly

¹ French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 499–527. New York: Norton, 1973.

(and showed relative mercy to the dog). The revised manuscript was finished by August 1935; by then the Steinbecks had also moved into a newly constructed home near Monterey, California. The year 1935 was even more significant for other reasons, however, because this was the year in which he began researching California's migrant farm workers—research that would eventually lead to the composition of his masterwork, *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the meantime, however, a number of his less famous books were issued in limited editions this year, and in March 1937 *Of Mice and Men* was published and became immediately successful. The Steinbecks were now able to travel in northern Europe as well as in the Soviet Union, and on their return in midyear his notable collection of stories¹, *The Red Pony*, was published, to be followed in the fall by an enormously well-received stage version of *Of Mice and Men* on Broadway (Steinbeck himself, however, never attended a performance). Meanwhile, early in 1938 a stage adaptation of *Tortilla Flat* was much less successful, but in general the late 1930s were perhaps the most satisfying years of Steinbeck's creative career. In 1938 the dramatic adaptation of *Of Mice and Men* won the top award of the New York Drama Critics' Circle; also during 1938 Steinbeck was hard at work on the novel that would soon be published as *The Grapes of Wrath*. He finally finished the book in November, by which time his collection of short stories titled *The Long Valley* had been published and was doing well both with critics and with the buying public.

It was in 1939, however, when he achieved his greatest critical and popular success. *The Grapes of Wrath* appeared in April and was soon the country's best-selling novel. Even readers who disliked it recognized its political importance. Indeed, the book was too often discussed as a

¹ French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 499–527. New York: Norton, 1973.

political document rather than as a work of art—a fact that led, for a long time, to insufficient appreciation of the work as a well-crafted novel. It was actually burned or banned in various American locales and was even denounced in Congress; farmers' associations considered it a left-wing libel, while leftists naturally embraced it. In any case, it was not long before Hollywood purchased the film rights; nor was it long until the work was turned into an unusually fine movie directed by John Ford and starring Henry Fonda, which appeared by the end of the year—at around the same time as the release of a separate film based on *Of Mice and Men*. Steinbeck himself, in fact, was increasingly becoming involved in motion pictures: In 1939 he collaborated on a documentary called *The Fight for Life*, and it was in Hollywood in 1939 that he met and began an affair with a singer named Gwendolyn (“Gwyn”) Conger. Nevertheless, his now-strained marriage to Carol would briefly continue, and during 1940 he worked on further film projects, including the script for a movie called *The Forgotten Village*¹.

The highlight of 1940, however, was the news that *The Grapes of Wrath* had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. (With typical generosity, Steinbeck gave the prize money to a fellow novelist to help him complete a book of his own.) Early in 1941 Steinbeck purchased a small home back in Monterey, near Salinas. By spring he had separated from Carol, at around the same time as the publication of his newest book (*The Forgotten Village*, based on the script of the film). He was also now at work on a screenplay of *The Red Pony*, and the end of the year saw the appearance of his innovative work *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journey of Travel and Research*, co-written with his scientist friend Ed Ricketts. By this time, of course, the United States had been plunged into World War

¹ French, Warren. “John Steinbeck.” In *Sixteen Modern American Authors*. Vol. 2, A Survey of Research and Criticism since 1972, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 582–622. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990.

II, and soon Steinbeck began his own contributions to the war effort. His novel *The Moon Is Down*, which takes place in occupied Norway, appeared in March 1942, followed quickly in April by a staged version on Broadway and plans for a film. Steinbeck also began work on an officially sanctioned book about the U.S. Army Air Force; this soon appeared as *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team*. Although plans for a film of that book were soon in the works, it never appeared, but by the end of the year Steinbeck had completed the script for a new movie—*A Medal for Benny*—and a Hollywood film of his earlier novel *Tortilla Flat* was issued, directed by Victor Fleming and starring Spencer Tracy.

Although the major event in Steinbeck's life in 1946 was the birth of his son John (in mid-June), he also completed a novel titled *The Wayward Bus*, which was published early in 1947. By this time, however, his relationship with Gwyn had begun to falter, as had his own health. Nevertheless, after recovering well enough to travel, he visited France with Gwyn in midsummer and then travelled without her in Eastern Europe for much of the rest of the year. In November *The Pearl* appeared in book form (having earlier been published in a magazine), followed early in 1948 by the film version, which was itself followed in the spring by the publication of his book titled *A Russian Journal*. Unfortunately these successes were soon counterbalanced by various kinds of misfortune¹, including hospitalization for minor surgery, the death of his good friend Ed Ricketts, and (by October) final divorce from Gwyn. Although Steinbeck tried to distract himself from such troubles, he nevertheless began drinking too much and became severely depressed. Professionally, however, he continued to prosper; he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters by the end of 1948, and early in

¹ French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors*. Vol. 2, A Survey of Research and Criticism since 1972, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 582–622. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990.

1949 the film based on his own screenplay of *The Red Pony* (with music by Aaron Copland) was released. During that same year he met Elaine Scott, the wife of the actor Zachary Scott, and by the end of the year she had filed for divorce from her husband and had moved in with Steinbeck. Meanwhile, in 1950 he continued his work in film and theater, collaborating on a movie titled *Viva Zapata!* (released in 1953), while also seeing his latest work (*Burning Bright*) first produced as an unsuccessful Broadway play and then released as a novel. By the very end of 1950 he had married Elaine, but he was also hard at work during this period on a lengthy new novel—to be titled *East of Eden*—which he hoped would be a major book. The novel was published late in 1952, after a period in which Steinbeck and Elaine had travelled widely in Europe. Commercially the book was a success, but critically it was less so. Despite Academy Award nominations in 1953 for his work on the film *Viva Zapata!* (which had been released the year before), and despite his work on other literary projects, Steinbeck during this time was depressed.

Nevertheless, he was anything but paralyzed or inactive. He was moving in high society; he was writing frequently for newspapers; he collaborated on plans to turn *Cannery Row* into a musical; he was able to travel widely; and in 1954 his latest novel, *Sweet Thursday*, was published. In 1955 the film adaptation of *East of Eden* (overseen by the notable director Elia Kazan and starring James Dean) appeared, and toward the end of that year *Pipe Dream*, a musical created by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II and based on Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*, was produced on Broadway (although without much success). Steinbeck was increasingly involved in politics (he actively supported each of Adlai Stevenson's three presidential campaigns, in 1952, 1956, and 1960), and in 1957 he actually published a short satirical novel based on the French political scene titled *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*. Yet

much of his time during the late 1950s was consumed in foreign travel, and his health had become unpredictable. His literary production during this time was not especially noteworthy; his novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*, which was published in 1961, totally pleased neither the critics nor Steinbeck himself. He achieved a genuine popular success, however, in 1962 with the publication of *Travels with Charley in Search of America*, which recounts a long, 10,000-mile car trip he took with his dog around the country in 1960. It was also in 1962, however, that Steinbeck—to the surprise of many and the utter astonishment of not a few—was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.

Many thought that he was hardly the most deserving candidate, but this was not the first (or last) time that the Nobel award created this kind of controversy. In the final five years or so of his life, Steinbeck functioned frequently as a kind of national cultural ambassador. He travelled widely in Europe and in the Soviet Union in 1963, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964 from Lyndon Johnson, travelled in England and Ireland in 1965, and was named by Johnson to the council of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1966. During this time he supported the war in Vietnam and in fact even travelled there in 1966 and 1967, filing positive reports about the conflict for a New York newspaper, but by April 1967 he had returned to the United States with an injured back that required surgery. Although the operation (which took place that fall) succeeded, Steinbeck suffered a stroke at the end of May 1968 and then two heart attacks in the next few months. By this time he had become disillusioned with the war, but his days as an active political commentator had now ended. When he died of heart failure on December 20, 1968, he was widely considered one of the most important American writers of the 20th century. Although, as do many great authors, he had long outlived his most creative period, he had nonetheless produced

thousands of pages of memorable work. Probably none of those pages, however, were more memorable or of longer-lasting significance than *The Grapes of Wrath*.

1.3 Influences and Directions in Steinbeck's Works

Steinbeck grew up in California's Salinas Valley, a culturally diverse place with a rich migratory and immigrant history. This upbringing imparted a regionalistic flavor to his writing, giving many of his works a distinct sense of place. Salinas, Monterey and parts of the San Joaquin Valley were the setting for many of his stories. The area is now sometimes referred to as "Steinbeck Country". Most of his early work dealt with subjects familiar to him from his formative years. An exception was his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, which concerns the pirate Henry Morgan, whose adventures had captured Steinbeck's imagination as a child¹.

In his subsequent novels, Steinbeck found a more authentic voice by drawing upon direct memories of his life in California. His childhood friend, Max Wagner, a brother of Jack Wagner and who later became a film actor, served as inspiration for *The Red Pony*. Later he used real American historical conditions and events in the first half of the 20th century, which he had experienced first-hand as a reporter. Steinbeck often populated his stories with struggling characters; his works examined the lives of the working class and migrant workers during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression².

¹ French, Warren. "John Steinbeck." In *Sixteen Modern American Authors*. Vol. 2, A Survey of Research and Criticism since 1972, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 582–622. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990.

² Harmon, William, and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.

His later work reflected his wide range of interests, including marine biology, politics, religion, history, and mythology. One of his last published works was *Travels with Charley*, a travelogue of a road trip he took in 1960 to rediscover America.

CHAPTER II. PRACTICAL PART. ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITIONAL FEATURES OF NOVELS BY JOHN STEINBECK

2.1 Analysis of “The Grapes of Wrath”

The Grapes of Wrath is one of the most important American novels ever written. It documents one of the worst struggles the people of this country ever faced: the Dust Bowl of the Great Depression. But through the use of Biblical language and Biblical symbolism, Steinbeck imbued his great work with a sense of something bigger and constant, something that manages to be both hopeful and dire. Through the use of key elements from the Old Testament-an exodus, a deluge, the ark, a plague-and the New Testament-the sacrifice of a Christ figure, a baptism, a communion, a manger of sorts-Steinbeck manages to take us through the development of the Bible: namely, the overthrow of an old, rigid system for the embracement of something new. In the Bible, Jesus rejected the Great Temple of Jerusalem and its rigid adherence to the laws of Moses in favor of the communal love of society as a whole; love over judgment. In Steinbeck, the migrant people reject the American economic system to find their own way, while the Joads specifically learn that self-interest must be sacrificed to work for the good of everyone, that "strength can be achieved through a selfless unity of the entire community"¹.

When Tom Joad returns to his family's Oklahoma farm after having been released from prison (where he served time for killing a man in self-defense), he discovers that his family, along with thousands of others, have been evicted from their land as a result of bank foreclosures sparked by a dusty, persistent, and destructive drought. Accompanied by Jim

¹ Grapes of Wrath Study Guide // <http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/> / William Jones. Symbolism in Steinbeck's Novels <http://www.helium.com/>

Casy, a preacher they have known for years who has now turned his back on conventional religion in favor of a simpler commitment to human welfare, the Joads (Ma, Pa, Granma, Grampa, Tom, Al, Ruthie, Winfield, the pregnant Rose of Sharon, and her husband, Connie) pack up as many of their belongings as they can cram into an old truck and begin a desperate journey, as do hundreds of thousands of other “Okies,” toward California, where they have heard that jobs are plentiful. By the end of the novel, after making a few good friends but also after suffering many hardships and disappointments, the group begins to disintegrate: Grampa and Granma have died, Connie has deserted, Casy has been killed, and Tom has killed Casy’s assailant and must flee, but Rose of Sharon, although having lost her baby, is able, at Ma’s urging, to show compassion to a man even more needy than the Joads themselves¹.

The Grapes of Wrath is generally considered to be Steinbeck’s best book as well as a classic of American literature. Although the novel has sometimes been criticized as too long, too sentimental, and too propagandistic, it has also been vigorously defended. Champions of the work have praised its large cast of memorable characters, its vivid language (especially its striking imagery, convincing dialogue, and use of lively rural dialect), and its structural innovation (particularly its alternation of chapters focusing on the Joads with “intercalary” chapters offering a broader picture of various social developments). When the book was first published, it was enormously controversial as well as highly popular; opponents of the work accused Steinbeck of offering an inaccurate and deliberately distorted view of the economic and social conditions he claimed to depict, while other readers found the novel realistic, credible, and profoundly moving. Some readers felt that interest in the novel would dwindle as the depression-era conditions it describes

¹ Donahue, Agness McNeill, ed. *A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Crowell, 1968.

receded in memory; others, however, think that Steinbeck wrote in a timeless style about issues of enduring human concern¹.

It is, in fact, the style of this book that helps to make it so effective. It would not matter what topics Steinbeck wrote about if his language were dull, tedious, or commonplace, but the language of *The Grapes of Wrath* is brimming with energy and vitality, especially in its use of dialogue and dialect but also in its imagery, symbolism, and descriptive passages. When Steinbeck depicts people, places, or events, he usually (in this book, at least) has the power to make us *see* them, and when he lets his characters talk, real people seem to speak. Entering the pages of this novel is like entering a previously unknown but highly intriguing region in which persons employ language that is unself-consciously poetic in its freshness and sharp precision. Thus Tom does not simply say that his feet were tired; he says, “My dogs was pooped out”

Later, explaining one effect of his time in prison, he remarks that “when you been in stir a little while, you can smell a question comin’ from hell to breakfast”² (*Grapes* 223). Casy, the preacher, later describes a girl who is “so full of the Holy Sperit that it’s sproutin’ out of her nose and ears”. Likewise, he subsequently asks himself, “ ‘Why is it that when a fella ought to be just about mule-ass proof against sin, an’ all full up of Jesus, why is it that’s the time a fella gets fi ngerin’ his pants buttons?’”. What (exactly) does it mean to be “mule-ass proof against sin”? Presumably it means to be stubbornly or even almost stupidly immune to temptation; in any case, the language is much more evocative than if Steinbeck had written something like “completely untempted by sin.” Similarly, the metaphorical phrase “all full up of Jesus” implies that Jesus is like a brimming, nearly overflowing liquid, and the metaphor is

¹ Donahue, Agness McNeill, ed. *A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Crowell, 1968.

² Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

therefore much more powerful than if Steinbeck had simply said “truly committed to Jesus.” Finally, the imagery of a “fella . . . fingerin’ his pants buttons”¹ is much more precise, vivid, and memorable than if Steinbeck instead had colourlessly written, “a man becomes sexually excited.” In phrase after phrase, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph, Steinbeck reveals a sure command of the idiomatic English actually spoken by the real people he describes. That dialect, however, far from seeming dated or quaint, retains its power to startle, surprise, and stimulate, and one of the pleasures of reading *The Grapes of Wrath* is the pleasure of anticipation—the delight in knowing that each new page will reveal diction (especially spoken diction) that will seem colorful, vibrant, zesty, and yet always entirely credible. Quite simply, the novel is full of what Casy himself at one point calls “the poetry of folks talkin’”.

The rural dialect of the book is, however, only one strength of the novel’s language. Similarly important is Steinbeck’s highly skillful use of dialogue, which he employs to characterize the speakers, to advance the plot, and to underscore themes in subtle ways. As with his use of dialect, examples are extremely numerous, but one instance may be taken as typical. Thus, at one point, Al works on a car while Tom talks to a one-eyed man whose whining self-pity and maudlin self-consciousness he finds annoying. As he rebukes the handicapped man, the following exchange occurs (with Tom speaking first): “I knowed a hump-back in—in a place I was. Make his whole livin’ lettin’ folks rub his hump for luck. Jesus Christ, an’ all you got is one eye gone.”²

The man said stumblingly,

“Well, Jesus, ya see somebody edge away from ya, an’ it gets into ya.” “Cover it up then, goddamn it. Ya stickin’ it out like a cow’s ass.

¹ Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

² Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

Ya like to feel sorry for yaself. There ain't nothin' the matter with you. Buy yaself some white pants. Ya gettin' drunk an' cryin' in ya bed, I bet. Need any help, Al?"

"No," said Al. "I got this here bearin' loose. Jus' tryin' to work the piston down."

"Don't bang yaself," said Tom.

The one-eyed man said softly, "Think— somebody'd like—me?"

"Why, sure," said Tom. "Tell 'em ya dong's growed sence you los' your eye."¹

In this vignette, each separate person is deftly characterized, not only through the words he speaks but also by the manner in which he speaks them. Tom, for instance, is typically blunt, direct, and honest; here as elsewhere, he does not mince words, although his tone here is sharper than usual. When he refers to the handicapped person he once knew, he does not call him a "handicapped person"; rather, he calls him a "hump-back." Yet Tom can also be evasive when he needs or wants to be; thus, the prison in which he spent time is simply called "a place I was." The profane references to Christ, meanwhile, are exactly the kind of language we might expect from such characters, while the staccato rhythms of Tom's angry instructions mimic perfectly the cadence, inflection, and intonation (not to mention the imagery) of a real exasperated outburst. Overall the language of the passage is precise, concrete, and exact, not abstract or general ("Ya gettin' drunk an' cryin' in ya bed, I bet" is much more effective than "You're feeling depressed, aren't you?"). Yet Tom can immediately switch from anger at the one-eyed man to a practical concern with Al's work on the car, and Al, focused on his important work, remains oblivious to the argument. Tom can seem almost mean to the handicapped man while also seeming solicitous toward Al, and yet

¹ Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

Tom, perhaps regretting his earlier sharpness, can also end the exchange with a reassuring joke. In just a few swift sentences, then, Steinbeck uses dialogue to depict his characters memorably, move his plot forward, and underline such important themes as the virtues of determination, the dangers of self-pity, and the value of stoic endurance.

Although much of *The Grapes of Wrath* (to the novel's great benefit) advances by means of this kind of energetic dialogue, the book is also famous for its reflective and interpretive passages, in which the omniscient narrator pulls us back from our immediate focus on the Joads to give us broader insights into the conditions of the hundreds of thousands if not millions of people who were undergoing similar experiences. At one point, for instance, when speaking of these people, the narrator remarks that suddenly the machines pushed them out and they swarmed on the highways. The movement changed them; the highways, the camps along the road, the fear of hunger and the hunger itself, changed them. The children without dinner changed them, the endless moving changed them. They were migrants. And the hostility changed them, welded them, united them— hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shotguns, guarding the world against their own people.

Passages such as this reveal Steinbeck's ability to use standard English just as eloquently and effectively as he uses rural dialect. Each word, each detail, is carefully chosen, and then all are assembled in a masterfully arranged paragraph. The word *machines*, for instance, implies an unfeeling, unthinking, inhuman power, while the word *swarmed* implies that the displaced people now resemble insects or animals. The constant repetition of the word *changed* mimics the grinding, relentless forces the passage describes, while the progression of details becomes

ever-more specific: First abstract “movement” is mentioned, then more specific “highways,” then even more precisely imagined and inhabited “camps along the road,” then the “fear of hunger” among the people who inhabit those camps, then not just the fear of hunger but the actual hunger itself, and then, finally, not just hunger itself but the hunger of starving children. After the long series of repeated references to “change” comes a very brief and entirely different kind of sentence: “They were migrants.” Three simple words sum up all that is important about their new condition. And then the focus switches from the swarms of migrants themselves to the people who have changed from ordinary, everyday citizens of “little towns” into armed “squads.” The final quoted sentences are steeped in paradoxes, as “clerks and storekeepers” (who are usually anything but militant) arm themselves with “shotguns,” intent—in a final paradox—on “guarding the world against their own people.” If in his scenes featuring dialogue Steinbeck shows his ability to zoom in for close-ups, in passages such as the one just quoted he shows his skill at offering panoramic overviews.

Much of the dynamic rhythm of the book results from this constant interaction between the specific and the general, between chapters on the Joads and chapters on the conditions they represent, but even the most “general” portions of the novel are rarely abstract, dry, or imprecise.

Steinbeck, then, uses dialect, dialogue, and exposition to great effect, but he also simply shows enormous skill in coining memorable phrases and phrasing. Thus the dust that coats a truck is compared to “red flour,” while children are pacified with candy they have “whined out” of their father (*Grapes* 310). A young boy is “kid-wild and calfish,” while a young pregnant woman has a “knowing perfection-look.” Connie, when staring at his pregnant wife, “was proud” (as we might expect) but also “fearful” (a bit of a surprise). Connie himself is a “sharp-faced, lean

young man of a Texas strain, and his pale blue eyes were sometimes dangerous, and sometimes kindly, and sometimes frightened”. Through such subtly complicated phrasing, Steinbeck implies the complexity not only of the characters he describes but of human beings in general: Connie cannot be easily explained, because no person is easily explainable¹.

People are complicated, but so are physical environments and social conditions, and Steinbeck’s language tries to do justice to all the complexities involved. More often than not, however, his phrasing is not only complex but also sharp and precise, conveying an unforgettable impression. Thus, one character “would raven with lust for some whore,” and, having paid for three prostitutes at once, “snorted and rutted on their unresponsive bodies for an hour”. Again and again and again, Steinbeck summons up just the right words to create whatever picture he means to impress on our memories. His general diction is thus every bit as effective as his use of dialect or dialogue.

Steinbeck uses all these stylistic strengths (and many more) in the service of a number of significant themes or key ideas. His book has been seen, for instance, as lamenting the passing of the old belief, associated with Thomas Jefferson, that American democracy would be best sustained by a citizenry composed mostly of small independent yeoman farmers². Steinbeck is clearly a “small-d” democrat (not a communist, as some of his detractors alleged) who has enormous faith in the “common people.” In this sense he is a writer clearly in the tradition of Whitman, Thoreau, and especially Emerson, and indeed Jim Casy’s notion that humanity shares one big soul is obviously indebted to Emerson’s transcendentalist idea of the Oversoul—an idea that similarly

¹ Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

² National Steinbeck Centre: <http://www.steinbeck.org/MainFrame.html>
<http://www.iblist.com/author.php?id=153>

stresses the importance of the bonds that unite all people. Steinbeck's social and political ideal, however, is not any forced collectivism (of the sort associated with Bolshevism) but rather a voluntary group cooperation, in which free individuals see the practical and spiritual advantages of joining for mutual assistance. Casy himself, meanwhile, is obviously a kind of secular Christ figure: His initials are *J. C.*; he has turned away from religion as conventionally practiced; he travels with a band of 12 people (including Sairy and Ivy Wilson, whom the Joads befriend on their journey); and he dies while trying to help others and while speaking words clearly similar to Christ's last words on the cross: "You don' know what you're a-doin' " ¹ (*Grapes* 621). Because Casy's words are repeated twice just before he dies and are then quoted twice again later by Tom, the parallel with Jesus becomes impossible to miss. Tom subsequently becomes a kind of apostle of Casy's cause, and Rose of Sharon's final act—in which she offers her milk-swollen breasts to a man who is starving—becomes a kind of secular Eucharist.

The whole movement of the Joads from Oklahoma to California is an ironic re-enactment of the exodus of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt to their hoped-for freedom in the promised land, and California itself is potentially a land of milk and honey—in which, however, neither the Joads nor many others find any immediate salvation. Thus in its language, its ideas, and even its title, the book draws on the rich biblical heritage that has been central to a good deal of literature and culture in the West, and yet the novel uses that heritage to promote ends that are more secular than conventionally sacred. The book is a protest against the growing materialism, alienation, and selfishness of American life, but if Steinbeck is hopeful about a solution at all, he does not put his trust in

¹ Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

God but in the basic decency of common people united by a sense of their own best interests.

Themes of the Novel

The most dominant theme of *The Grapes of Wrath* is that of **the oversoul**. Although the novel never uses this exact word (it is a term used by Ralph Waldo Emerson, though perhaps not precisely in this manner), the concept is clearly present as early as Chapter 4, when Jim Casy speaks of his realization that "all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of." Because all people are connected in this fundamental way, the distinctions between families, which once seemed so important, are radically diminished. Readers will note how Ma Joad—who, it must be pointed out, begins with an understanding that all people must help each other—must fight to hold on to this understanding as the crucible of her experiences tempts her to abandon it. In the Hooverville, for instance, Ma is at first reluctant to share her stew with hungry children who are not her own; in the end, however, she does share it. The novel's final scene offers the fullest image of "the oversoul," in which Rose of Sharon—who for so long before the delivery of her child was concerned only with her own (legitimate) needs—offers the milk her body made for her own stillborn baby to a man dying of hunger. Her cryptic smile suggests that she has come to the same understanding as had Casy: that all folks are "my own folks." Home is being with our "own folks," broadly—and, so the novel argues, most properly—defined as our fellow human beings.

In Chapter 4, Casy, when confessing his struggles over sex, raises the issue of a **dichotomy between flesh and spirit** which reappear throughout the novel. It is close to the heart of the new revelation toward which Casy moves as the story continues. Readers will note it again, for instance, when the Jehovahites try unsuccessfully to convince Ma that

Granma's death is a good rather than an ill; or again, in the Weedpatch camp, when Mrs. Sandry denounces the Saturday night parties as sin. She does not take part in the dancing, and so can consider herself among the few remaining "true believers." Steinbeck seems to reject a division between flesh and spirit. Just as all people must come to know their place in the "oversoul" of the human family, so must people recognize that all life, physical and spiritual, is holy. For this reason, perhaps, Casy tells Uncle John repeatedly that the only "sin" is what people decide is "sin." It may also be the reason John is presented as such a tortured character: Were he able to simply acknowledge his past, both its good and its bad, rather than judge it, he might live more at peace with himself.

Another tension explored in the novel is a **dichotomy between words and deeds**. We see it first, for example, in Chapter 6. As Muley Graves talks about his inability to leave the land to which he has grown so attached, Casy finds himself drawn to "them folks that's gone out on the road." He feels compelled to help them-but not, he feels, as a preacher, for these "Okies" in exile "need help no preachin' can give 'em." Casy tells Muley-who, somewhat like Casy in Chapter 4, has wondered about the appropriate or inappropriate nature of his speaking-that he must talk even if it feels wrong or dangerous: "Sometimes a sad man can talk the sadness right out through his mouth. Sometimes a killin' man can talk the murder right out of his mouth an' not do no murder." Throughout the novel, readers should bear in mind the question: When is speech "just words" and when does speech itself play a redeeming function? For the novel, the answer seems to be that speech is redemptive when it accurately addresses people's experience. For this reason, for instance, all of Casy's "prayers" in the book are not pious petitions of an otherworldly nature, but honest acknowledgments of pains and needs faced in this world. Such frank speech counteracts the harmful speech found in the

book-take as one instance the recurrent slang term "Okie"-and empowers people to take action to face their situations, whether that action be striking for just working conditions or simply moving on in search of safety. Honest speech precedes honest action.

The nature of **anger** is also a central theme in the book. Following the glad reunion of mother and son in Chapter 8, for instance, Ma Joad asks Tom if his time in prison has made him angry-in her words, "poisoned mad." Tom assures her that it has not, but he does show anger when he thinks about "what they done to our house." Ma urges Tom not to fight "'em" alone. She does, however, admit to wondering: "They say there's a hun'erd thousand of us shoved out. If we was all mad the same way, Tommy-they wouldn't hunt nobody down-" Here, Steinbeck has raised the question of the proper role of anger-appropriately enough, considering the book's title (which echoes images of divine judgment in both Jeremiah 25:30 and Revelation 14:19-20, as well as in the first stanza of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"¹. What are "the grapes of wrath"? What fruit, sweet or bitter, might anger yield? When Tom says good-bye to Ma in Chapter 28, we seem to learn that anger can, in fact, yield positive fruit when joined to a knowledge of the "oversoul," the one human family, to which we all belong. Tom's anger drives him to fight not only for himself but for all the oppressed. It is righteous anger, motivated by a desire to see all people treated fairly and with dignity-as opposed to the unrighteous anger of land owners who see the migrant workers as threats to their own comfort and prosperity.

Structure and Style of the Novel

In alternating macrocosmic with microcosmic chapters, Steinbeck manages to give *The Grapes of Wrath* both particularity and universality. While the novel deals with timeless themes, the experiences of the Joad

¹ Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings 1936–1941*. Edited by Robert DeMott and

family and other "Okies" illustrate these themes in concrete ways. Steinbeck thus prevents his novel from becoming an abstract treatise on social theory; at the same time, he keeps it from becoming too time-bound. The story is simultaneously about the Great Depression and about human life in general (suitably so, since the connection of all human life is the novel's dominant theme). For example, in Chapter 5, readers learn about "the monster": The reified banking system that is driving farmers off their land. This chapter gives us an appreciation of the complicated social forces at work during the Depression, forces which, as the text says, men created but could not ultimately control. Chapter 6, however, shows us those forces at work in the specific life of Muley Graves. By focusing on Muley, Steinbeck allows us to feel the emotions behind the wide sweep of economic devastation. By balancing the universal and the specific, the macrocosmic and the microcosmic, Steinbeck captures both the epic scale and personal emotion of a dark chapter in American history.

2.2 Analysis "Of Mice and Men"

"Of Mice and Men" was the first work by Steinbeck to win him enormous popularity¹. First published as a short novel with an unusually high degree of dialogue, this playlike work was soon transformed into an award-winning drama that pleased both audiences and critics alike. Later the story became the basis of a well-regarded film. Meanwhile, the novel continues to be very widely read (especially in high schools), and the play has been adapted and filmed several times since the release of the original movie in 1939. Yet although the novel is often considered

¹ Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

one of Steinbeck's best, it has also been subject to severe criticism over the years.

Plot of the Novel

The novel opens by focusing on two working-class drifters who are also close friends: George Milton is small, intense, intelligent, and skilled at practical survival, while Lennie Small is a huge, childlike, mentally retarded man whose affection for soft little animals (such as mice and puppies) often leads, ironically, to their deaths because Lennie has no sense of his own strength when he tries to caress them. The two men dream of someday owning a small farm together, but in the meantime economic necessity compels them to take work on a ranch populated by a variety of other lonely workmen and overseen by the small, pugnacious Curley (whose belligerence leads him into conflict with practically everyone—including, to his misfortune, the gigantic Lennie) and Curley's wife, whose prowling, flirtatious, almost predatory yearnings, combined with her fundamental loneliness, lead to her accidental death during an unfortunate encounter with Lennie. As Curley and a mob pursue Lennie with the intention of vengefully killing him, George, in an ironic act of mercy, preempts them by shooting Lennie himself—thus ending not only the life of his best friend but also his own dreams of the life they had hoped to share¹.

Its characters have been condemned as simplistic stereotypes; its plot has been attacked as too predictable; its tone has been censured for being too sentimental; its language has been called uncouth and uninspired; and its themes have been called thin and rudimentary.

¹ Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

Even Steinbeck himself expressed some reservations about the success of the book, but it nevertheless continues to be read, admired, studied, and praised.

As many of Steinbeck's works do, this one focuses on relatively simple working-class people who must struggle to survive. It shows the loneliness that pervades the lives of many people, but it also shows the satisfactions that can result when persons let down their guard and embrace the possibilities of friendship. Communication among the characters is often awkward, stilted, and inarticulate, but when true communication does occur, it can provide immense satisfactions.

The novel reveals the genuine capacity of people to care for (and about) one another, but it also shows the obstacles that so often stand in the way of a satisfying sense of community. The novel also emphasizes the importance of dreams and aspirations in sustaining the will to continue living. As do the characters in Steinbeck's later masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*, George and Lennie seek security, peace, and happiness by pursuing the dream of owning and working a small plot of land they can call their own, and, as with the characters in that later novel, their dreams are ultimately thwarted. Nevertheless, in both works Steinbeck implies that without dreams to motivate and sustain them, human beings suffer from desperation and isolation. The book implies the rewards that can result when people bond and cooperate, but it also suggests that friendship, communication, cooperation, and community are rare, fragile things that can easily be lost or broken. The language in *Of Mice and Men* is plainer, simpler, less vibrant, less colorful, and less lively than the language in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Whereas that later novel is full of rich dialect and vivid imagery, the language of the earlier book seems relatively drab by comparison, as perhaps befits its relatively drab setting, characters, and themes. Occasionally, however, Steinbeck

breathes distinctive life into the phrasing, as when he describes how travelling tramps “jungle-up” near a woodland pond, or when bed-bugs are described as “pants rabbits” and “graybacks”, or when a character reports that Curley has “yalla-jackets in his drawers”. At times, too, the narrator’s descriptions are nicely and precisely observed, as when he describes how George “unrolled his bindle and put things on the shelf, his razor and bar of soap, his comb and bottle of pills, his liniment and leather wristband” (*Novels . . . 1932–1937* 810), or when he describes how the hair of Curley’s wife “hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages” (*Novels. . . 1932–1937* 819), or when he reports how another character “held a crushed Stetson hat under his arm while he combed his long, black, damp hair straight back” (*Novels . . . 1932–1937* 821). In addition, the language of the narrator is often psychologically shrewd and insightful, as when he notes that the supposedly slow-minded Lennie, in an early conversation with George, “avoided the bait” and “spoke craftily” (*Novels . . . 1932–1937*, 806)¹. Lennie, then, can be more cunning and less psychologically simple than he seems. A similar psychological complexity is implied later when the narrator refers to “those Western magazines ranch men love to read and scoff at and secretly believe” (*Novels . . . 1932–1937* 809)², and comparable insight into the complex workings of human minds is demonstrated when the narrator later observes how a black character, insulted by a sarcastic white woman, “had retired into the terrible protective dignity of the negro” (*Novels . . . 1932–1937* 855)³. At moments like these, Steinbeck peels back the layers of characters who are less simple than they may

¹ Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

² Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

³ Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

otherwise appear. For the most part, however, the characters in this novel are not especially complicated. This is particularly true, of course, of Lennie, whose simplicity is crucial to his role. He represents a kind of innocence, decency, and kindness that would not be entirely credible—and would also seem much too saccharine and sentimental—in a normally mature human being. Steinbeck thus makes Lennie a half-wit, but by doing so, he helps us see that much of what passes for “normal” human behaviour also seems crude and uncaring when juxtaposed with Lennie’s fundamental decency and goodness. Although numerous characters ask George whether Lennie is crazy, one of Lennie’s functions in the book is to highlight through contrast the craziness of much supposedly “normal” behavior. Curley and his wife, for instance, are much closer to being mentally disturbed in the truest sense than Lennie ever is, and much the same might be said of Carlson, a somewhat sadistic ranch hand who seems all too eager to kill another ranch hand’s aged dog. By contrast, Lennie is passive, peaceful, and benevolent; any hurt he inflicts (whether on animals or later on Curley’s wife) is entirely unintended. Yet his capacity for committing violence also helps make him a somewhat menacing figure and thus prevents him from seeming an entirely maudlin or mawkish character. Always lurking beneath his gentle exterior is the potential for destruction, and thus he is a natural source of suspense in the plot. At the same time, however, his killing of Curley’s wife (like his earlier confrontation with Curley himself) seems almost entirely predictable. Because he lacks a full intelligence, Lennie also lacks the kind of free will and capacity for independent thought and choice that are crucial traits of a truly complicated character.

In the plot of this book, Lennie is partly a wild card, partly a victim of fate, and partly a puppet (though a largely appealing puppet, to be sure) in the hands of Steinbeck himself. George is clearly a more

complicated figure. If Lennie symbolizes the body, George represents the mind. Yet George is obviously also capable of real feeling; his willingness to help look out for Lennie and help keep him out of trouble shows his capacity for kindness and even for love, and his final act of killing Lennie (to prevent Lennie from being captured and killed by a violent mob) is, paradoxically, the most compassionate deed in the book. Beneath his often gruff, sarcastic exterior, George is a romantic at heart; his dream of having a small place of his own where he can enjoy peace, security, and freedom is a romantic dream to which almost everyone can relate, while his concern for Lennie (and the many practical sacrifices he endures while acting on that concern) makes him the moral touchstone of the novel. His frequently blunt, occasionally caustic style of speech helps prevent the novel from seeming overly sentimental, as when, in exasperation with his friend's forgetfulness, he tells Lennie, "Jesus Christ, you're a crazy bastard!"

At times George even adds a much-needed touch of comedy to this otherwise somber tome, as when Lennie notes that George had recently told another character that he and Lennie were cousins, to which George responds, "Well, that was a lie. An' I'm damn glad it was. If I was a relative of yours, I'd shoot myself". When we first read this exchange we laugh in sympathy with George's frustration, but in retrospect, of course, his comment seems profoundly ironic. By the end of the novel, George does indeed act toward Lennie with the kind of love one would hope for from a member of one's family, but it is not George who is shot, but Lennie. At the same time, however, by killing Lennie George also kills a deeply valuable part of himself. By acting morally to prevent pain to Lennie, he creates pain for himself. Of all the characters in the novel, he is the most complex. Unfortunately some figures in the book amount to little more than caricatures. Both Curley and his wife, for instance, are

almost cartoonish: He is a short-tempered, thuggish boor, while his wife is a vampish tart. Neither arouses or sustains much real interest; instead, both are convenient stooges, and it is hard to take either of them very seriously. Steinbeck's efforts to provoke some sympathy for Curley's desperate housewife sometimes veer toward sentimentality, and in the final analysis her death provokes little compassion either for her or even (ironically) for Lennie, partly because the wife seems so unappealing and partly because the death seems almost a foregone conclusion from the time we first see the two characters together. However, in the same way that Curley and his wife seem too simplistically debauched, Slim (a mule driver on the ranch) can seem too simplistically virtuous, sane, and sensible. He is obviously the anti-Curley—the man whom the rest of the men admire and respect; however, just as Curley represents one extreme of the moral and psychological spectrum, so Slim represents the other extreme. Neither is as intriguing a character as George (whose seemingly unselfish devotion to Lennie is in some ways as puzzling to us as it is to the other characters). In any given situation, Slim will predictably behave well and do good, in the same way that Curley will just as predictably behave badly. Less predictable (and therefore more interesting) is Crooks, the sole black ranch hand. In his encounter with Lennie, he is by turns hostile, defensive, vulnerable, pitiable, cruel, and kind. He is, in short, a recognizable human being whose complications make the relative superficiality of some of the other characters—particularly Curley and Curley's wife—all the more apparent by contrast.

Themes of the Novel

When discussing the thematics of Steinbeck's novel, we would do well to first examine the title, which is an allusion to a line of Robert Burns, a Scottish poet: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft

aglay." Translated into modern English, the verse reads: "The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry." This cynical statement is at the heart of the novel's action and serves as a foreshadowing prophecy of all that is to come. For, indeed, the novel's two main characters do have a scheme, a specific dream of changing their current way of life in order to have their own place and work only for themselves. The tragedy, of course, lies in the fact that no matter how elaborately our heroes plan, regardless of how intensely they hope and dream, their plan does not find fulfilment.

This is a novel of defeated hope and the harsh reality of the American Dream. George and Lennie are poor homeless migrant workers, doomed to a life of wandering and toil in which they are never able to reap the fruits of their labor. Their desires may not seem so unfamiliar to any other American: a place of their own, the opportunity to work for themselves and harvest what they sow with no one to take anything from them or give them orders. George and Lennie desperately cling to the notion that they are different from other workers who drift from ranch to ranch because, unlike the others, they have a future and each other. But characters like Crooks and Curley's wife serve as reminders that George and Lennie are no different from anyone who wants something of his or her own.

All the characters (all the ones that Steinbeck has developed, at least) wish to change their lives in some fashion, but none are capable of doing so; they all have dreams, and it is only the dream that varies from person to person. Curley's wife has already had her dream of being an actress pass her by and now must live a life of empty hope. Crooks' situation hints at a much deeper oppression than that of the white worker in America—the oppression of the black people. Through Crooks, Steinbeck exposes the bitterness, the anger, and the helplessness of the

black American who struggles to be recognized as a human being, let alone have a place of his own. Crooks' hopelessness underlies that of George's and Lennie's and Candy's and Curley's wife's. But all share the despair of wanting to change the way they live and attain something better. Even Slim, despite his Zen-like wisdom and confidence, has nothing to call his own and will, by every indication, remain a migrant worker until his death. Slim differs from the others in the fact that he does not seem to want something outside of what he has, he is not beaten by a dream, he has not laid any schemes. Slim seems to have somehow reached the sad conclusion indicated by the novel's title, that to dream leads to despair.

Another key element is the companionship between George and Lennie. The two men are not unique for wanting a place and a life of their own, but they are unique in that they have each other. Their companionship contrasts the loneliness that surrounds them-the loneliness of the homeless ranch worker, the loneliness of the outcast black man, the loneliness of the subjected woman, the loneliness of the old, helpless cripple-and it arouses curiosity in the characters that they encounter, Slim included. And indeed, the reader becomes curious as to their friendship as well. And can we call it friendship? Lennie would call George a friend, but George would perhaps be hard-pressed to admit the same of Lennie. As he tells Slim, he has simply become so used to having Lennie around that he "can't get rid of him". Despite his annoyance, George also demonstrates protectiveness, patience, and pride when it comes to Lennie. He is perhaps motivated to stay with Lennie by a sense of guilt, or responsibility, or pity, or a desire to not be alone himself. Most likely it is a combination of all of these motivations. Yet it seems strange that George would choose to remain with Lennie, given the danger that Lennie causes for the both of them. George is not blind to the fact that life would

be easier without Lennie, and he often yearns for independence when Lennie becomes troublesome, creating a major source of tension in the novel. This tension is not resolved until the final gunshot by the riverside, when the strain of Lennie's company makes it impossible for George to survive with his companion.

By killing Lennie, George eliminates a monumental burden and a threat to his own life (Lennie, of course, never threatened George directly, but his actions endangered the life of George, who took responsibility for him). The tragedy is that George, in effect, is forced to shoot both his companion, who made him different from the other lonely workers, as well as his own dream and admit that it has gone hopelessly awry. His new burden is now hopelessness and loneliness, the life of the homeless ranch worker. Slim's comfort at the end ("You hadda George" (118)) indicates the sad truth that one has to surrender one's dreams in order to survive, not the easiest thing to do in America, the Land of Promise.

Structure and Style of the Novel

The novel opens with two workers who are crossing the country on foot to find work. George is a cynical, irresolute man. George looks after his companion, Lennie--treating him like a brother. Lennie is a giant man of incredible strength, but has a mental disability that makes him slow-to-learn and almost child-like. George and Lennie had to flee the last town because Lennie touched a woman's dress and he'd been accused of rape.

They begin to work at a ranch, and they share their dream: they want to own their own piece of land and farm for themselves. These people--like them--feel dispossessed and unable to control their own lives. The ranch becomes a microcosm of the American underclass at that time.

The climactic moment of the novel revolves around Lennie's love of soft things. He pets the hair of Curley's wife, but she gets scared. In the resulting struggle, Lennie kills her and runs away. The farmhands form a lynch mob to punish Lennie, but George finds him first. George understands that Lennie cannot live in the world, and he wants to save him the pain and terror of being lynched, so he shoots him in the back of the head.

The literary power of *Of Mice and Men* rests firmly on the relationship between the two central characters, their friendship and their shared dream. These two men are so very different, but they come together, stay together, and support each other in a world full of people who are destitute and alone. Their brotherhood and fellowship is an achievement of enormous humanity¹.

They sincerely believe in their dream. All they want is a small piece of land that they can call their own. They want to grow their own crops, and they want to breed rabbits. That dream cements their relationship and strikes a chord so convincingly for the reader. George and Lennie's dream is the American dream. Their desires are both very particular to the 1930's but also universal.

2.3 Analysis of “The Red Pony”

The Red Pony is a collection of four interrelated short stories: “The Gift,” “The Great Mountains,” “The Promise,” and “The Leader of the People” (discussed earlier). In “The Gift,” 10-year-old Jody Tifl in is presented with a young horse by his rather stern and distant father (Carl Tiflin) and the father’s wise and friendly ranch hand, Billy Buck, but

¹ Steinbeck, John. *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*. Edited by Robert DeMott and Elaine A. Steinbeck. New York: Library of America, 1994.

Billy Buck is unfortunately unable to prevent the horse from catching cold and dying. In “The Great Mountains,” young Jody is approached by an old Spanish-speaking man of Mexican or Indian heritage, who returns at the end of his life to live his remaining years on the land (now owned by the Tifl ins) where he was born, but when Carl Tifl in refuses him more than temporary hospitality, the old man steals an old horse named Easter (whom Carl no longer values) and rides off into the nearby mountains on the animal’s back. In “The Promise,” Jody is promised by his father and Billy Buck that he can raise the new colt due to be delivered by Nellie, but when the long-awaited day arrives, Billy Buck must kill Nellie in order to ensure that the colt is born safely.

The stories included in *The Red Pony*, like many stories about children, are essentially tales of initiation— that is, tales in which a young person is initiated into the often hard facts of adult reality and into the often painful ways of the world.

Each of the stories (including the last, “A Leader of the People”) deals in some way with the theme of actual or approaching death: In “The Gift” the pony dies; in “The Great Mountains” the old man is facing imminent death; in “The Promise” the mother horse dies so that her colt may live; and in “The Leader of the People,” Jody’s own grandfather is facing the sunset of his life. As the stories are read in sequence, Jody grows not only physically but also psychologically and morally; by the time one reads the fi nal story, Jody has reached an important new level of maturity and shows himself capable of a kind of sympathy, empathy, and compassion that are to some degree lacking in his father, who is older than Jody in years but who in some ways seems emotionally stunted. Indeed, the relations between Jody and his parents provide much of the “human interest” of the stories—an interest that also depends on the boy’s relations with Billy Buck, who provides a different kind of role model

than Carl Tiflin. Billy seems more closely in tune with Jody's feelings than the boy's own father does, and in fact Billy seems to combine the best aspects of conventionally male and female behavior: He is strong, wise, decisive, and physically capable, but he is also a nurturing figure who is capable of showing tenderness and concern both to the animals he cares for and the boy he cares about. In the final story, Jody shows that he has learned well the lessons of concern and compassion that Billy Buck teaches by quiet example.

Steinbeck does an effective job of conveying the personalities of all the major characters, presenting none of them in a simplistic or unequivocal way. Carl Tiflin is the closest to seeming coldly unappealing and one-dimensional, but even he has his attractive and complicating aspects. In "The Gift," for instance, he enjoys pretending to be stern with his son just before he gives the boy the gift of a lifetime, and when he sees how happy the boy is with the pony, he retreats in befuddled embarrassment. Carl, in other words, is not a fundamentally cold man; he is simply (like many men of his time) uncomfortable with showing the tenderness he is capable of feeling. He is a sensible, practical man, and if he sometimes seems chilly and even a bit mean (particularly in the second tale), he is also able to recognize and apologize for his shortcomings (as he does most obviously in "The Leader of the People"). Even when he is rebuked openly by Billy Buck in front of Jody (as happens at the very end of "The Gift"), he seems willing to tolerate the chastisement, and the fact that Billy feels comfortable enough with Carl to criticize his employer so blatantly speaks well (ironically) of Carl's own character.

Carl, in short, is not the simple villain he could easily have been in the hands of a lesser writer. By the same token, Billy Buck is not the kind of plaster saint that a less talented author might have created. He is in many ways an attractive alternative to Carl, but he is capable of making

mistakes (as when he misjudges the effect a rain storm may have on the pony's health), he is capable of losing his temper (as he does with Carl at the end of "The Gift"), and he is even capable of being angry with—and swearing at—a young boy when he feels frustrated at having had to kill Nellie in order to save her colt and fulfil his titular "Promise" to Jody. Billy's anger, however, is always rooted in love—love for Jody at the end of "The Gift" and love for Nellie at the end of "The Promise." He is a perfect example of the kind of rock-solid but kindhearted common working man whom Steinbeck especially admired.

In crafting this series of stories, Steinbeck created a small but entirely credible community of real persons who reflect the kinds of thought and feeling common to their time and place while also reflecting deeper, more universal, and more timeless habits of the human heart and mind.

Themes of the Novel

Jody Tifflin begins this novel as a thoughtful but somewhat malicious boy who daydreams by the mossy spring tub yet destroys a small bird then dissects and discards it with the same regard he crushes a melon and hides the evidence. By then end of the story cycle, however, he has learned what it means to be a grown man through his experiences with death. His first great lesson comes when Gabilan the pony dies under his care. Next, his fascination with the mountains and the old man Gitano lead him to consider his own mortality. The turning point comes in "The Promise" when he learns that life and death are "inseparably bound together." Finally, his appreciation for his grandfather teaches him empathy and the value of respect. Jody's offer to comfort his grandfather with a glass of lemonade, and the gesture of mature respect for another's feelings that the gesture contains, demonstrates that the boy is beginning to view the world as a man. In order to reach that point, however, he first

had to understand that man is powerless against death and acceptance of this condition is the essence of manhood.

The stories that comprise *The Red Pony* are suffused with examples of man's powerlessness against the laws of nature. Billy Buck's failed attempt to save the pony's life teaches Jody that even the ministrations of the man whose abilities he admires coupled with his own vigil and care cannot circumvent death. Even the buzzard that he kills in senseless anger fails to acknowledge the boy's desire for revenge. His experience with Gitano - who unfalteringly claims that he will stay on the ranch because he was born there but departs on the old horse Easter - causes the boy to consider that much of a man's life is immutable and unknown like the mountains into which the old man and the horse retire. When Billy Buck must kill Nellie to save her colt Jody comprehends that his friend has been forced to sacrifice a life in order to keep his promise to deliver another safely. And finally Jody learns that the passage of time eclipses an individual man's work when he empathizes with his grandfather's obsession with the past.

Steinbeck's narrative is full of rich details that impart a vivid picture of life on a 1930's-era California ranch. From Jody's mother setting up cottage cheese in a cotton bag hung above the sink to Billy Buck's method of testing his knife point by pricking the inside of his lip, *The Red Pony* serves as a valuable resource for understanding the time and place from one of its best chroniclers.

Structure and Style of the Novel

Each of the stories that comprise *The Red Pony* begins during a specific season that complements the mood and emotional arc of the story. Jody receives Gabilan in the late summer, just two weeks after the

start of school, and the pony becomes the defining element in Jody's life. Though he is still a boy, the pony gives Jody greater standing with his peers whom he brings to jealously observe the pony. It's not until the following summer when Jody is in the midst of training the horse that the unique, personal relationship between boy and horse begins to take root. The normally carefree days of summer that were once marked by boredom are now structured by the desire to train the horse. The cold early-winter rain that soaks the horse causes an illness which eventually kills it. Nature, though not directly responsible, plays a key role in undermining Jody's hopes. In "The Great Mountains" the long summer season of relative inactivity provides the perfect setting for Jody's daydreams and speculations. Gitano enters Jody's life on the dusty road and departs into the dry mountains and though Jody seeks solace at the spring tub he cannot escape the great truth that he has glimpsed. "The Promise" begins appropriately in the spring when all of nature is exploding with life. Steinbeck uses heavily sexual-tinged metaphors to describe the time period during which Nellie mates. He talks of the "wild oat heads just clearing their scabbards" and the stallion's "stiff erected nostrils" that are "red as flame." When the colt is delivered the following February at the cost of Nellie's life the lesson that death and life are joined is augmented by the dying winter season and the promise of another spring.

From the first ring of the triangle that signals breakfast at the beginning of "The Gift," Steinbeck's story cycle offers a myriad of details about life on the Tifflin ranch. Steinbeck claimed that the inspiration for the stories came from his own childhood experiences and the author faithfully preserves many of the day-to-day details from the era. Some of the most interesting details come in passing moments such as when Jody enters the kitchen and finds his mother clabbering milk in a cotton sack hung above the kitchen sink. Elsewhere, Steinbeck presents a series of

methodical details that enrich the story and maintain its detached tone. For instance, the mixture that Billy prepares for the ailing Gabilan occurs during a period of mounting anxiety in the plot: "It was a long canvas nose bag with straps to go over a horse's ears. Billy filled it one third-full of bran and then added a couple of handfuls of dried hops. On top of the dry substance he poured a little carbolic acid and a little turpentine." This careful attention to detail not only gives the reader some insight into the practices of horse care from the period but complements the mounting tension in the story. The sections of "The Gift" that deal with Gabilan's training are particularly detailed and offer a vivid account the gentle but firm technique that Billy Buck practices and which is drawn from Steinbeck's own experiences as a boy. "Of course we could force-break him to everything but he wouldn't be as good a horse if we did," Billy remarks.

CONCLUSION

Many know John Steinbeck from his highly acclaimed novel “The Grapes of Wrath”. In fact, Steinbeck is one of less than ten American authors to have claimed the Nobel Prize in literature. He did this with what he considers his greatest work, “East of Eden”, which is a tale based very loosely on his very own family history. Steinbeck's character and words live on 40 years after his death. Subsequent generations discover his work and are as transfixed by his words as they were when they were first written. John Steinbeck will definitely live on... John Steinbeck, a classic author, uses one of the many elements of literature to enhance the mood. This element is imagery. There are two moods in the story, the light and peaceful mood and the dark, scary mood. Both moods are supported by his imagery. The imagery makes you feel as though you are right there to see, smell, hear, and feel what is in the story. This intensifies moods.

In studying his novels we learned that:

- The Grapes of Wrath is based on a true story. John Steinbeck was a journalist by mind and a novelist by heart. He tells the tale of a family who left Oklahoma at the height of the Dust Bowl and headed for California to find something better. What they found was a federal camp and extremely hard work. Not to mention the glaringly bitter revelation of their own inferiority;
- In the novel “Of Mice and Men” Steinbeck conveys themes within his characters to create a strong first impression on the reader and shows them why they are important to the story. Steinbeck creates strong first impressions of his characters to show the reader their significance to the story and how they are all central to the main theme that dreams never materialize;

- In the novel 'Of Mice and Men' by John Steinbeck, one character the reader gets a strong first impression of is George. When George first speaks, the reader can immediately tell that he is the parent in the relationship between he and his friend Lennie. "Dammit Lennie don't drink so much." Steinbeck also conveys a theme of unfulfilled dreams of migratory and ranch workers in 1930s America in George;
- John Steinbeck, a classic author, uses one of the many elements of literature to enhance the mood. This element is imagery. There are two moods in the story, the light and peaceful mood and the dark, scary mood. Both moods are supported by his imagery. The imagery makes you feel as though you are right there to see, smell, hear, and feel what is in the story. This intensifies moods.

In conclusion we would like to admit that distinctly American, Steinbeck remains highly recognized for his journalistically clear writing style, realistic descriptions of nature, especially his native California, powerful symbolism, and for his descriptions of America. Intensely sympathetic to the difficult lives of those mired in poverty, his fiction poignantly details Depression-era America. His novels, he remains one of the best loved American authors of the twentieth century.

Steinbeck's writing stands out above that of his peers. For though he spoke out through his writing about the poor conditions of farmers and migrant workers, and the rough life that these very people had in order to make ends meet, it is his writing style that buoys him to the forefront of American literature. His animated descriptions, his vivid tales, and his love for the written word bare his soul to his readers.

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