CHAPTER 6

THE ART OF FICTION
John Steinbeck was a versatile writer who developed several patterns of writing, and made use of a large wealth of forms, ideas, themes and techniques. Some of his works show that he sees man's position in the universe as naturalistic because he finds man at the mercy of certain uncontrollable and unforeseeable forces, but at the same time, he finds man capable of resisting these forces. Nature, fate, heredity, environment, society-these seem to deprive man of his free choice. Steinbeck's biological view of man, i.e. that man has animal instincts and drives, also seems to refute the belief in man's nobility, dignity and free moral choice. He views man as an organism, both as individual and as a part of a group and at many places, he clearly establishes comparisons between men and animals, particularly sea-creatures. His biological view, complete objectivity and non-teleological thinking also led him to a naturalistic vision of life. But his non-teleological approach makes his world more subtle and convincing. And he is able to treat very controversial subjects such as labour-strikes, migrant-labourers in search of livelihood, the dehumanization of workers by the governing classes, social and political injustices etc. without being biased, didactic or sentimental. But his objectivity does not alienate him from humanity. It rather leads to an extension of stark reality to present what "is", and stops lapsing into propaganda.
Steinbeck’s biological view of man and his realistic and naturalistic picture of the world and mankind are well balanced with his moral approach. His belief that man’s awareness of his position raises him above the ordinary level, and his developing consciousness enables him to face the eternal conflict between good and evil. He does not present man simply a victim of the world. No doubt the forces of nature, fate, heredity and social environment influence man’s choice. But he is not a helpless victim of these forces because he has been given the freedom to choose from the various courses open to him. He may exert this choice thoughtfully and overcome the inherent difficulties of his situation and attain whatever salvation is possible.

Throughout his literary career, Steinbeck continually attempted to reconcile several incompatible views of mankind. Owing to his wealth of themes, forms and techniques, the categorization of his works is a very difficult task. He has successfully merged scientific ideas, social realities, economic thoughts, biological views and non-teleological reflections with moralistic approach, artistic forms and cosmic consciousness. His desire to convey social realities sometimes caused him to over-sympathise with characters who are victims of society to the point of being accused of sentimentality. On the other hand, his tendency to be objective left him to the charge of being too detached. His later fiction is characterized by a predominance of social
problems while, in his early works, there is scientific objectivism and subjective social commentary.

Steinbeck wrote with the purpose he has advocated. He has exposed the economic system, organized religion, middle class values, businessmen’s world, the hazards of war and the way society treats its misfits. He has given vent to feelings of disillusionment many times because of the great depression, economic upheaval and the ethical erosion. He has depicted human existence as a conflict and often as a savage battle but he was essentially an affirmative writer. He has expressed faith in the capacities of men to make life worth-living. The heterogeneous racial structure of the American society, the world of commerce with high-headed business executive engaged in all exclusive worship of goddess ‘success’, the world of letters, determined by practicalists and dewy-eyed visionaries, all result in a wide variety of characteristics in American life and all are represented in the works of John Steinbeck.

Steinbeck has mingled his social realism with his biological view of man and his non-teleological thinking. According to Richard Astro, his interest in marine biology dates back to the days before he met Edward F. Ricketts. Astro has observed that Steinbeck was originally influenced by William Emerson Ritter’s doctrine of the organismal conception that all parts of nature are part of a gigantic whole, and the only unit of life is the organism.¹
Steinbeck has viewed man as an organism, both as individuals and as a part of a group, especially in *In Dubious Battle* and *Cannery Row* and later in *Sea of Cortez* he has clearly established this view. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the miserable plight of the migrants is due to the unbalanced system because a small number of people control the land and money. Their future becomes hopeful only when the migrants establish commensal relationship. Steinbeck’s biological interest played a dominant role in determining his attitude to man and the life-processes in the world. A number of critics like Edmand Wilson, Alfred Kazin and Stanley Edgar Hyman designated Steinbeck’s attitude to human beings as no more than animalistic. Steinbeck once observed, “I find it valid to understand man as an animal before I am prepared to know him as a man.”

In fact he preferred all that is natural—the land and the sights around, the paisanos who are close to earth as opposed to commercial successes. He has celebrated a natural “philosophic moral system” in *Tortilla Flat*. He always accepted what ‘is’ that is, what the reality is. His acceptance of what ‘is’ along with his interest in biology contributed to his use of naturalism. In his story ‘Flight’, Pepe has no control over the forces of environment, heredity, nature and society. But unlike earlier writers of naturalism, like Zola, Crane or Norris, he did not believe that these forces deny man his free will. He balanced his use of biology with psychological element in his fiction. He has
made extensive use of animal imagery to depict Pepe, Johny Bear, the 
woman in "The Snake", Mary Teller and Elisa Allen, yet the emphasis 
is on psychological realities. He has created many psychological 
portraits, and while analyzing them, he has used them to analyse the 
psyche of other characters also. The psychological dilemma gains wider 
significance as he relates it to moral problem and cosmic significance 
as in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Steinbeck developed what he called non-teleological thinking to 
attain scientific objectivity. In *Sea of Cortez*, he has explained this, 
"We discussed intellectual methods and approaches, and we thought 
that through inspection of thinking technique a kind of purity of 
approach might be consciously achieved—that non-teleological or 'is' 
thinking might be substituted in part for the usual cause-effect 
methods... This attitude has no bearing on what might be or could be as 
if so-and-so happened. It merely considers conditions 'as is'". He has 
illustrated this by discussing that part of the cause of unemployment 
during the Depression which was due to 'shiftless' and 'negligent' 
destitute families that had to be supported by the government.

Steinbeck's social realism became more subtle because of his 
approach. Non-teleological thinking requires complete objectivity and 
detachment like that of a scientist. He regards mankind and society as 
subject to the same laws of nature that govern other living organisms. 
So he could treat many controversial subjects without becoming biased,
didactic or sentimental. He achieved such objectivity in *In Dubious Battle*, which he described as ‘a brutal book’. He said that it was more brutal because in it there was no author’s moral point of view. Without giving any authorial comment, he has successfully exposed social realities such as unbalanced land distribution, mob violence, the manipulation of human beings and the loss of individuality. To portray stark realities of life he collected materials for his *The Grapes of Wrath* after travelling extensively and living with migrant workers. What a non-teleological thinker really experiences, Steinbeck claims, is not a loss of feeling and emotion but an immense expansion. “Non-teleological methods more than any other seem capable of great tenderness, of an all-embracingness which is rare otherwise”.

Richard Astro has observed that Steinbeck’s philosophy of life is a dualistic philosophy, a combination of cosmic idealism and empirical realism. He has traced this dualistic philosophy in the character development of Jim Casy, who began as a non-teleological visionary believing that “there ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do” but develops into a teleological activist. Like Jim Casy, Steinbeck also moved from non-teleological thinker to involved social realist. The objective portrait of the strikers and strike in *In Dubious Battle* was followed by a sympathetic portrait of the workers in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* which shows the response of an involved writer without lapsing into propaganda of
sentimentalism. In his later novels such as *Burning Bright* and *East of Eden*, Steinbeck has criticised society through authorial comments rather than 'showing' it to us through technique.

Steinbeck's use of mentally retarded characters has been a widely discussed matter. They have been called half-wits, freaks, idiots, animals, beast-men etc. But he has established their retardation in less pejorative terms. For example, he writes about Tularecito: "After the fifth year his brain did not grow any more". He further adds, "He is not crazy; he is one of those whom God has not quite finished". Maxwell Geismer saw them as 'freaks' designed for our amusement. To Geismer Lennie is "more like a digestive disturbance than a social problem".

Steinbeck's retarded misfits are, in fact, mirrors because their treatment by society reflects society's attitude, prejudice and injustice. Also, there are times when some of these retarded characters serve in the capacity of literary foils. By contrast, they serve to develop the characteristics of other characters such as Tularecito of Bert Munroe, Hazel of Doc, and Lennie of George. Society makes no allowance for the retarded misfits and the writer's criticism of the society is obvious because some of these retarded misfits are more admirable than the civilized people around them. His other misfits are the paisanos of *Tortilla Flat*, and Mack and the boys in *Cannery Row*, because they represent qualities that he admired as opposed to the values of society,
His compassion for the mentally retarded transcends his compassion for the underprivileged classes.

Steinbeck has exposed many social evils such as hypocrisy, corruption, violence, unfair business practices and dehumanization. The characters who covet or practise these things are the villains of his fiction. He has portrayed and condemned the social injustices in a number of his novels. He has shown his concern for the less fortunate by emphasizing the way society treats them such as the efforts of the growers in *The Grapes of Wrath* to reduce the migrants to the level of animals and the sub-human attitude towards retarded misfits. He has condemned the efforts of society to force a hypocritical system of values on all people. Those who do not go with the society’s way of thinking are misfits. They are either destroyed or institutionalized by the hostile and uncaring society. Junius Maltby in *The Pastures of Heaven* is forced to leave his idyllic existence in the valley and the Lopez sisters are condemned for their ‘innocent’ way of prostitution.

Steinbeck’s concern with morality is visible in all his works from Henry Morgan’s amorality to Ethan Hawley’s conversion to conformity. His criticism of organized religion and conventional morality abounds in such works as *Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, The Pearl* and *The Winter of Our Discontent.* Although he does not criticise anyone’s belief in God, he does find fault with certain products of organized religion; intolerance, fear, hypocrisy and greed. He has found fault in
factions of Protestantism as seen in Burton in *To a God Unknown* and
in religious fanaticism as shown in the depiction of the Weed patch
camp in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He was neither a pagan nor an atheist.
He repeatedly advocated a humanitarian religion based on love and
understanding as shown in the character of Jim Casy and the songs of
*The Pearl*. He has established free moral choice for man in *East of
Eden*. He believed that man is capable of great love, only he has to
learn to accept his cosmic identity, that is, to learn that he is an
integral part of the whole design of existence. He has observed in his
Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech that “he lived, as a writer, to celebrate
man’s proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit, courage,
compassion and love” and secondly that “a writer who does not believe
in the perfectibility of man” cannot claim to have a true vocation.8

Steinbeck has an abundance of every gift and craft the novelist
can have—except an intelligent and coherent sense of what structure is
and can do. Austin Warren and Rene Wellek thus defined both structure
and materials:

> It would be better [in view of the difficulties in the use of such
terms as form and content for literary analysis] to re-christen all of
the aesthetically indifferent elements “materials”, while the manner
in which they acquire aesthetic efficacy may be styled “structure.”
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and part formerly considered formal. "Structure" as a concept includes both content and form so far as they are organized for aesthetic purposes. 9

As a gloss on this definition, consider the established distinction "with respect to structure"... between two overlapping but recognizable types of fiction- the panoramic (or epic) and the dramatic (scenic or well-made)." 10

These definitions summarize a widely accepted perspective in critical theory; that perspective illuminates the essential reason for Steinbeck’s inability in most of his novels, especially over a range of novels, to reach the highest eminence. Particularly, he has a continuing difficulty in fusing a structure and specific materials into a harmonious unity.

Steinbeck was very much aware of this problem, as evidenced in private letters and notes, in his published criticism, and in the novels themselves. It is not too much to say that for Steinbeck the significantly conscious effort in writing a novel was located precisely in attempts to work out a relationship between structure and materials. Not many writers—not even Henry James—have been as self-conscious or as puzzled as Steinbeck in facing this aspect of the art of narrative. It follows that Steinbeck is not benefited markedly by his striking if occasional success in handling the relationship between structure and materials, for each try tends to be a new effort within a consistent
range. Most obviously, certain identifiable technical situations recur in Steinbeck’s longer fiction.

A Steinbeck novel tends to have either a panoramic or a dramatic structure. Steinbeck works at the extremes; he rarely combines panoramic and dramatic structures. Usually a panoramic structure in a Steinbeck novel is a series of episodes that are related to each other by little more than chronology. A dramatic structure in a Steinbeck novel is more tightly organized: Events and characters are bound neatly into firm relationships by a brief or highly selective time sequence and often by a moral of philosophic motif. Steinbeck uses a fairly relaxed style with a panoramic structure; his dramatic structure has a tenser, more patterned style. A typical defect in a Steinbeck novel is that its structure—whatever its type—is developed for its own sake, independent of the materials, to the extent that structure and materials tend to pull apart. This defect is evident in a majority of Steinbeck’s novels, but it is especially evident when Steinbeck relies on allegorical elements or an allegorical scheme to shore up or stiffen either type of structure. On the other hand, a Steinbeck novel is most successful when its structure is fused harmoniously with the greatest possible variety of materials. This success is rare, but it is nearly absolute when it does occur. Finally, in such novels Steinbeck mingles panoramic and dramatic structures in developing the materials.
Steinbeck lists several practical examples which suggest that cause-effect relationships are too simplified to be true in experience, that "the truest reason for anything's being so is that it is", and that the various genuine reasons for anything "could include everything."\textsuperscript{11} The effect of the theory on structure is that any presumed need for artful design in the novel is no longer valid for Steinbeck. The theory implies that characters and events have an order and a rationale as they appear in the objective world; that art cannot improve on this order and rationale; that hence the only function of the artist is to report accurately whatever he sees in the natural world. This subordination of art to observation results in an exaggeratedly objective realism, an almost wholly undirected panoramic narrative. Steinbeck's last five or six novels exemplify the resulting narrative freedom-or chaos. For example, in the later novels the narrative reach can be epic, or it can be reduced to a series of "true" observations or episodes that are sometimes incoherently free of working thematic relationships. In these novels the reader can be told that certain events have certain meanings within an allegorical system, which forces a conflict between the loose method of narration and the close meaning that is imposed on the narrative. All of these elements are full grown in \textit{East of Eden}. Significantly, they are present also in Steinbeck's earliest fiction, although much less at an extreme.
The literary application of "is" thinking exaggerates several tendencies that are deeply rooted in Steinbeck's art. The critic's problem, therefore, is to trace and perhaps to explain a development rather than to study a new departure. In short, the career proceeds in a more orderly way than a first glance might suggest, for what may seem to be new starts are deeply rooted in Steinbeck's concern to achieve a harmony between structure and materials.

I propose that to study the novels from this viewpoint can permit a judicious, friendly judgment of each novel in the context of a greater appreciation of a shape to Steinbeck's long career. The unpleasant fact is that too often Steinbeck's work has been viewed piecemeal, even when the critical intention has been to achieve a rounded view. As the main result, Steinbeck's "place" among American writers has continued to be less secure—since less defined—than any of the major novelists of his age. Notoriously, a seesaw of defense or attack in particular instances is the striking characteristic of much Steinbeck criticism. I am not, to be sure, the first or the only Steinbeckian to attempt a rounded evaluation or to think that such evaluation is preferable to self-contained divisions into pro or con. I can but hope that my viewpoint has its claimed efficacy in the candid judgment of the ideal or Johnsonian reader.

Steinbeck begins with a developed sense of the artful in fiction. He does not write a disguised autobiography two of three times over.
From the beginning, he searches for ways to achieve an ordered harmony in his art. He finds two distinct kinds of structure—panoramic and dramatic—to order his materials. Each of the first two novels is a fairly pure example of each structure. A number of aesthetic problems emerge, but Steinbeck does not solve them. Indeed, he is never able to work clear of these problems except partially and (as it were) by accident when circumstances minimize or resolve them. The combination of panoramic and dramatic structures is most evident in *In Dubious Battle* and to a somewhat lesser extent in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck reaches his peak as an artist in these two novels. Meanwhile, Various events and pressures lead to a simplified approach to structure, as in the three play-novelettes, and the results are unfortunate. At about the same time, “is” thinking offers a promising lead. Following such different novels as *Cannery Row* and *The Pearl* and the rather pure allegory, *The Wayward Bus* (all indebted to “is” thinking, for better or worse), Steinbeck settles on an extreme panoramic structure in *East of Eden* and the novels that follow. Frequently, in his final years, Steinbeck turned to journalism, in this work, as in all his work, an interest in technique was directed toward a harmony of structure and materials. This sketch reveals a complexity which forbids any simple reduction of Steinbeck’s career. He is serious and talented. His extremely uneven career calls for a particularly careful evaluation of his work; it precludes any simplistic dismissal.
Still, beyond the pattern of a constant search for an elusive harmony between structure and materials, it does appear that Steinbeck tends to move away from narrative order over the range of his longer fiction. Steinbeck worked largely by instinct, but he felt a strong need to work from a plan.\textsuperscript{12} Often, in practice, he deviated widely and disastrously from a cogent plan that implied the achievement of a harmony between structure and materials; the result could be a novel consisting of a visible structure and visible materials that are not resolved in each other. On rare occasions, when a structure is "given", so to speak (in the sense that \textit{The Pearl} is a natural parable), Steinbeck reverses his movement away from order. Whether total or partial, this reversal is momentary at best, but it occurs more than once. Hence, Steinbeck’s career proceeds in a series of zigzags, not in a straight line, and he does not “grow” as better or more fortunate writers do by applying the lessons of imperfect earlier work to the present. There is slow but definite movement – much accelerated in his last years—away from order.

This situation creates a number of problems for the analytical critic of Steinbeck’s longer fiction. First, the critic must be especially careful and insightful in matching criteria that are inevitably blunt (however closely terms are defined) with the actual complexities in Steinbeck’s career. There is the critic’s temptation to presume false similarities between novels. In fact, in its order, each novel presents a
somewhat different approach, and often enough a radically different approach, to the achievement of a harmony between structure and materials. The author’s search is fairly constant; the particular approaches and circumstances are not. Frequently, even apparent connections between different novels are quite misleading. Group-man occurs in several novels but the meaning of the concept shifts; the character named “Doc” recurs but changes strikingly from novel to novel; even a reuse of materials, such as class war, biological studies, or paisano life, does not ensure a thematic similarity between two novels. Yet the uncommonly irregular career does not permit the uncomplicated judgment that Steinbeck merely changed his mind. Certainly there is a pattern in Steinbeck’s work, but it is not simple; It is Steinbeck’s constant but changing search for a harmony between structure and materials. That search, in its dual directions, justifies the welter of technical devices and the differing materials and clarifies Steinbeck’s tendency to move away from order in the latest novels. The one direction suggests efforts to achieve harmony externally, through new devices of materials; the other suggests despair of achieving a harmony. It is true that, at his best, when structure and materials most fully cohere, Steinbeck has produced some of the more distinguished literature of our time, in spite of the equal truth that much of his longer fiction contains enough imperfection to have removed a less gifted writer from critical attention. So the peculiarly mixed bag that John
Steinbeck presents is a special testing of the purpose of criticism: to draw just distinctions, to make correct judgments in complex instances.

A second critical difficulty relates to Steinbeck's tendency to proceed with fresh starts—there are notable exceptions—once it is clear that a certain technique or materials lead away from or do not lead directly toward a harmony between structure and materials. But the vital and constant factor is Steinbeck's continuing efforts to achieve, or at least to define, a fictive harmony.

A third consideration is that panoramic and dramatic structures occur separately or in combination in novel after novel; a specific novel under discussion may be quite different from its neighbors, depending on what kind of structure is predominant and on how adequately it functions.

Fourth, because Steinbeck tends to compose by parts, not by the whole (with some notable exceptions), and can permit himself considerable freedom of invention once the general form of the novel is established, the critic may be faced with a novel in which excellent episodes do not connect fully with other episodes or advance an otherwise strong development. In either circumstance, critical analysis is correspondingly complicated.

Whatever Steinbeck read and whatever he observed in real life became for him a matter to be verified in terms of each other. Literature and theology became valuable to him only when he had put
to test all that he had learnt in the living laboratory of contemporary life. Man is the theme of his novels and stories from *Cup of Gold* to *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Man’s consciousness, or development is the object of his study with its externalization in the outward social scene. But the externals interested him only so far as they led him to the knowledge of the psychological, moral, and spiritual reality. He never told a story to beguile and entertain his readers. He never wrote anything that was not an experience which he shared with his readers. As a keen observer and a first-rate thinker, he was always in search of analogies and similarities of life-patterns in human and animal life. Such a study would initiate him into the timeless phenomenon of life on earth. For this, he scanned through the principal theological and religious literature of the east and the west; Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist. At the same time he studied the social, economic, and political working of different nations in Europe in general and of America in particular. He observed closely the rural life and its social conditions and also the urban social order. He examined the pattern of class-war, the problems of the working class, the labourers, and the migrants. But everywhere he dived deeper and saw the nucleus around which the forces of the individuals and the groups work on the level of human consciousness, so that the contraction and the expansion of consciousness, crawling into the shell of egoism and out of it, falling
into a state of spiritual and moral death and being able to resurrect and
to redeem itself, became the recurrent theme of his novels.

In his first published novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), we can study the
young Steinbeck flexing his literary muscles. By any standard, *Cup of
Gold* is a poor book, structurally unbalanced, unconvincing, populated
with cardboard characters, and written in an ornate style reminiscent of
James Branch Cabell. On the surface, it would appear to be a
completely atypical Steinbeckian production; and yet in this book, if we
look closely, we can observe Steinbeck groping toward the effective
expression of those themes and philosophies which were influencing his
thinking even at that early date. For example, one of the main themes of
*Cup of Gold* is the way in which the desire for wealth and power can
corrupt a man’s soul and eventually subdue the glowing vitality of his
spirit. It is a theme which is also very much in evidence and explored
in more penetrating depth in Steinbeck’s last published novel, *The

It is surely significant that the decade separating the publication
of Steinbeck’s first novel and the publication of his most famous work,
*The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939 coincided with the depression years in
America. They were also the years during which Steinbeck produced his
best work. Each of Steinbeck’s novels of this period reflects, in one
aspect or another, the nationwide yearning of the American people for
the better life, a paradise on earth relatively measured against the particular circumstances of the individual seeker.

Young Henry Morgan knows "a desire for a thing he could not name" a desire which is activated by the exciting stories related by the ex-farmhand, Dafydd, recently returned, a rich man, from his exploits in the Indies. Later in the book, when after a series of adventures Henry has become a feared buccaneer, his unformulated longings finally channel themselves into the obsessive ambition to capture the fabulous city of Panama (the "Cup of Gold" of the book's title) and to possess the legendary beauty La Santa Roja. Inevitably, reality destroys the dream. Panama is taken and sacked, but when at last Henry confronts La Santa Roja she humiliated him by repulsing his advances. He ends his days a disillusioned and somewhat ridiculous figure, attempting to reassure himself that "... now that I have lost my unnameable desire, I may not be happier, but there is more content on me".

Such ultimate disillusionment (but without the benefit of the possible peripheral contentment that Henry Morgan lays claim to) is also the lot of Joseph Wayne in To a God Unknown (1933) and of the dispossessed Okies in The Grapes of Wrath. Joseph Wayne seeks to realize his dream in "the long valley called Nuestra Senora ... in central California." There he discovers a veritable Eden and establishes his homestead. But by the end of the book, his wife dead, the family
community he had founded with his brothers now totally disintegrated, the land, and the animals dying from the terrible drought that has smitten the valley, he can only grievously reflect: "Something has failed ... I was appointed to care for the land, and I have failed."\textsuperscript{16} Only by making the supreme sacrifice of his own life is he able to save the land he loves.

The Joad family deludes itself that it will find economic salvation among the fertile peach orchards of California. That old satyr, Grampa, voices his own colourfully sensual idea of what life in the land of plenty will be like: "An', by God, they's grapes out there, just a-hangin over inta the road. Know what I'm a gonna do? I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full a grapes, an' I'm gonna set in' em, an' scrooge aroun', an' let the juice run down my pants."\textsuperscript{17} He does not survive to discover the absurdity of his vision. Possibly, he does not believe in it himself, for when the time comes for the family to embark on the long journey to California he becomes overwhelmingly aware that his roots in the home soil are too deeply embedded to be severed. Only by trickery is he forced into leaving and he dies of a stroke that same night when the Joads make camp at the side of the road.

The vast majority of Steinbeck's male characters similarly hunger for and identify themselves with the land and the productive soil. Noah Joad elects to stay by the banks of the Colorado River (the symbolic "beautiful river") and Mr. Wilson, whom the Joads meet on the road,
regards working in the orchards of California simply as a means to an
close: "... with them good wages, maybe a fella can get hisself a little
piece a land..." In the concluding paragraph of The Pastures of
Heaven (1932), the bus driver tells his passengers as he gazes down
with them into the valley: "I always think it would be nice to have a
little place down there. A man could keep a cow and a few pigs and a
dog or two. A man could raise enough to eat on a little farm." The
bus driver with his hankering for " a little place" prefigures
the two itinerant farmworkers, George and Lennie, in Of Mice and Men
(1937). Through the medium of the ill-fated Lennie, Steinbeck gives
perhaps the most poignant expression in modern literature of man's
yearning for the illusory paradise on earth. While George and Lennie
give ostensible purpose to their otherwise aimless existence by their
talk of one day in the essentially unspecified future buying their own
little plot of land, settling down and breeding rabbits, George
nevertheless appreciates the hopelessness of their plans. For him, his
countless repetition for Lennie's benefit of the desired components of
the ultimate utopia has become rather meaningless. For Lennie, on the
other hand, George's well-rehearsed phrases have always possessed a
glowing reality in his dim-witted brain and the rabbit farm remains for
him an attainable paradise to the very end of his life. He is repeating
with pathetic conviction George's mechanical sentences even as he
dies.
The theme of the unrealized American dream is carried over, though perhaps with less overall insistence and with somewhat different emphasis, in the novels of the post-war period. For Kino, the simple Mexican fisherman of *The Pearl* (1947), his life’s dreams do indeed at first seem to have been realized when he discovers the great pearl “as large as a seagull’s egg”. It takes the destruction of his home, the hunting down of himself and his family, and the death of his baby son to reconcile him to the inevitable truth that paradise is not contained in material wealth, so that only by throwing the pearl back into the sea from whence it came can he find peace of mind and physical safety. In *East of Eden* (1952) Adam Trask, like Joseph Wayne before him, believes he has found a paradise in the California valleys. He tells his neighbour, Samuel Hamilton; “... I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far I’ve had no Eden, let alone been driven out” But his idyll is short-lived and he is driven out of his Eden, spiritually, if not actually, by his wife, the evil Cathy, who after shooting him when he tries to stop her, abandons him and their newly-born twin sons to begin her sordid career in the brothels of Salinas. It is perhaps worth noting that in the whole sequence of Steinbeck’s novels and short stories the only characters who do in fact appear to attain a comparative contentment of sorts are the drop-outs of *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954) because
their material needs and their ambitions are almost non-existent, so they are never defeated by temporary adversity.

The irresistible need felt by man to own his little plot of land, put down roots into the earth and identify himself with-and, as it were, merge into — his natural surroundings manifests itself directly or indirectly in three other ways in Steinbeck’s fiction, each of these facets being detectable, albeit in an extremely pristine and unformulated manner in *Cup of Gold*.

First, there is the parallel drawn between man and the creatures of the animal kingdom. During his description of Morgan’s march on Panama, Steinbeck tells of small bands if Spanish Indians being “flushed from the thickets like coveys of frightened quail” Ethan Hawley, the protagonist in *The Winter of Our Discontent* notes; “sometime I’ve seen a look in eyes, a frenzied animal look as of need for a quiet, secret place where soul-shivers can abate, where a man is one and can take stock of it.”20 This analogy between man and animals recurs incessantly throughout the corpus of Steinbeck’s work, constantly accentuating the reality of man’s closeness to nature and to the atavistic instincts which are only barely disguised and suppressed by the often unreliable veneer of civilization. Animal symbolism and imagery are effectively used in *The Grapes of Wrath*, where animal attributes are given at one time or another to every one of the principal
characters, stressing the elemental mode of existence forced upon them by unhappy circumstance.

Second, there is Steinbeck’s vision of the living body as a metaphor for landscape In *Cup of Gold*, large rocks strewn along a mountain path are described as “crouched guardian things” and elsewhere mountain are said to have “the appearance of strong gray teeth.” In the opening paragraph of *East of Eden*, the foothills of the Gabilan Mountains are compared with “the lap of a beloved mother.” In the same way that animal imagery is most tellingly employed in *The Grapes of Wrath*, so the personification of landscape is given its fullest and most effective expression in *To a God Unknown*. In this book, Steinbeck presents the land as a living element in its own right, so that early in the narrative Joseph Wayne, caught up in a sort of pagan ecstasy and overwhelming sexual need, flings himself face downward on the ground and copulates with the land itself: “For a moment the land had been his wife.” In the same way that landscape can assume the guise of living flesh so living flesh can assume the guise of landscape. Sitting in dim lamplight in the living room of his house, Joseph Wayne contemplates “his slouched body ... his curved arms and hands resting in his lap ... A mountain range extended in a long curve and on its end were five little ranges, stretching out with narrow valleys between them. If one looked carefully, there seemed to be towns in the valleys. The long curved range was clad in black sage, and
the valleys ended on a flat of dark tillable earth, miles in length, which dropped off at last to and abyss.”

It is but a short step from these sort of analogies to the third and most profound facet of Steinbeck’s philosophical preoccupation with man’s intrinsic relationship with the land on which he lives, a relationship which indeed encompasses all creation – in other words, the holistic concept. The sage Merlin first voices this concept when he speaks to Robert Morgan, Henry’s father, of his fear of dying: “If by my living I give life to you, and fresh existence to the fields and trees and all the long green world, it would be an unutterable deed to wipe them all out like a chalk drawing.” Joseph Wayne’s sister-in-law, Rama, who seems endowed with a mystical understanding of Joseph’s true power and purpose in life, tells him: “‘You can’t see units, Joseph, only the whole.’” At the end of the book when, on the moss-covered rock in the mysterious glade in the center of the dying land, Joseph sacrifices himself by slashing his wrist, the final metamorphosis takes place:

He lay on his side with his wrist outstretched and looked down the long black mountain range of his body. Then his body grew huge and light. It arose into the sky, and out of it came the streaking rain. “I should have known,” he whispered. “I am the rain.” And yet he looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss. He felt the driving rain, and heard it whipping down, pattering on the ground. He saw his hills grow dark with moisture.
Then a lancing pain shot through the heart of the world. "I am the land," he said, "and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while." 27

This passage parallels Casey's moment of revelation when, in a crisis of self-doubt and confusion, he follows Christ's example and goes into the wilderness to rationalize his troubled thoughts: "'There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy.'" 28 Or, to express it another way, as Steinbeck does in *The Log From the Sea of Cortez* (1951), "ecology has a synonym which is ALL." 29 By the time he came to write *The Winter of Our Discontent*, however, Steinbeck's overt holistic viewpoint had gradually undergone a partial transmutation into a sense of individual acceptance of collective or universal guilt and responsibility. When some of the leading citizens of the community of Baytown are accused of graft, Ethan Hawley's wife reminds him; "'You're too sensitive, Ethan. It's not your crime.'" To which he replies; "'I was thinking maybe it is - everybody's crime.'" 30

This concept of communal unity is another of the themes which recur with almost fugue-like consistency throughout Steinbeck's fiction. One can cite as example the conquered township in *The Moon Is Down* (1942). When, in a passage omitted for some reason from the Bantam Edition, Colonel Lanser, the officer in command of the invaders, initially asks Mayor Orden for his cooperation, reminding him
that the townspeople will inevitably take their lead from him, Orden quickly corrects him; "... authority is in the town. I don't know how or why, but it is so. This means we cannot act as quickly as you can, but when a direction is set, we all act together." The truth of this statement is swiftly assimilated by colonel Lanser: "Mayor Orden is more than a mayor... He is the people. He knows what they are doing, thinking, without asking, because he will think what they think. By watching him I will know them." But, of course, it is implicit that ultimately the community spirit will prevail over armed might, over the implementation of forced labour and the execution of hostages. In fact, the arrest of the mayor, the elimination of the titular and moral leadership serves to cement unity even further.

Such communal singlemindedness of purpose can be observed elsewhere at work in such books as *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *Sweet Thursday*. The townships concerned are as living organisms, each member of the community dependent upon the others and all acting in concert toward a given aim as he parties in *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*, and the bogus lottery in *Sweet Thursday*. In these books, the community is a warm and benevolent entity. It is not always so. Because possession of the great pearl makes Kino a man apart, he can no longer be sure which of his friends and neighbours he can now trust. Beneath its ostensibly placid surface, the community is in ferment, collectively envious and antagonistic, rejecting that infinitesimal part
of itself which has become an outsider and which, by definition, poses a threat to the ordered existence of the whole. Similarly, in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, the town drunk, Danny Taylor, poses a threat to the community of Baytown inasmuch as he refuses, to sell the big meadow, his "ace in the hole" against the future, and thus, by blocking the construction of the airfield the community desires to service the district, standing in the way of community progress. Danny Taylor's elimination is therefore necessary before the community can benefit and flourish. Ironically, it is through the selfish agency of Danny's lifelong friend, Ethan Hawley, who successfully contrives to gain possession of the big meadow on Danny's death, that the community can at least, at Ethan's price, anticipate eventual realization of the long-delayed scheme.

Kino and Danny Taylor can accordingly be regarded as the infected cells of the body communal, which, together with an infection invading the body from without, have to be either cured or eradicated for the continuing healthy state of the total organism. The analogy is drawn by Doc Burton in *In Dubious Battle* (1936):

> When you cut your finger, and streptococci get in the wound, there's a swelling and a soreness. That swelling is the fight your body puts up, the pain is the battle.... Group-men are always getting some kind of infection.... [G]roup men ... seem to me to be a new individual. Not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all; he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in
your body are like you... [I]t might be worth while to know more about group-man, to know his nature, his ends, his desires. They're not the same as ours. The pleasure we get in scratching an itch causes death to a great number of cells. Maybe group man gets pleasure when individual men are wiped out in a war.33

Later in the book, when the strikers are at last stirred into violent action and set off en masse to attack the barricade erected by the authorities, Jim Nolan wonderfully describes to his mentor, Mac, what he has witnessed: "[I]t was just one big—animal, going down the road. Just all one animal."34 Mac agrees with him: "It is a big animal. It's different from the men in it. And it's stronger than all the men put together. It doesn't want the same thing men want..."35

In the short story "the Leader of the People," written approximately at the same time as In Dubious Battle but not published in America until 1938, Mac's words find echo in Grandfather's description of the wagon trains crossing the plains during the previous century: "'It was a whole bunch of people made into one crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering.'36 Returning to Cup of Gold, we find a parallel image in the bird's eye view of Morgan's men hacking their way through the jungle toward the golden city of Panama; "At a command, the head of the wriggling column swung to the left and began to gnaw its way through thicker underbrush" 37
The clear seminal role of *Cup of Gold* in the Steinbeck canon extends also to the author’s treatment of sexual mores and attitudes. Steinbeck’s philosophy of sex can be conveniently (though by no means definitively) divided into two distinct streams: first, the concept which regards sex as the most dominant of all universal life forces; and second, the view-point which sees women as essentially mere sex objects existing primarily for the instant physical gratification of the male and for the propagation of mankind. If Steinbeck’s women are not mere sex objects, then they tend to be either idealized mother figures like Mrs. Tiflin (*The Red Pony*) and Ma Joad, or idealized prostitutes like the Lopez sisters (*The Pastures of Heaven*), Dora Flood (*Cannery Row*), Faye (*East of Eden*), and Fauna (*Sweet Thursday*).

It is no coincidence that these big hearted prostitutes and madams are among the most sympathetic (if somewhat heavily sentimentalized) characters in the whole of Steinbeck’s fiction, for they undoubtedly express his own philosophy that sex, no matter from what angle one may regard it, is no furtive manifestation of the human psyche but an integral and indispensable factor of life eminently worthy of wholehearted and frequent celebration. Steinbeck has an obvious contempt for those of his characters who deny the sex drive in themselves. Of Joseph Wayne’s brother, Burton, We are told he “had embraced his wife four times. He had two children. Celibacy was a natural state for him. Burton was never well.”

For Joseph, on the
other hand, the “hopeless sin was barrenness, a sin intolerable and unforgivable” so that he is the vital force which can fertilize and give life even to the land and to the animals, and eventually and symbolically, by the shedding of his blood, the whole valley.

The characters in Steinbeck’s fiction can be divided almost equally between those who accept and celebrate sex as a purely physical and spiritual function, and those who, for one reason or another (disinterest, guilt, fear, or disgust), firmly sublimate the sexual drive in themselves. In the first category can be placed characters like Danny and Jesus Maria Corcoran (Tortilla Flat), Al (The Grapes of Wrath), Doc (Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday), and Juan Chicoy and Camille Oaks (The Wayward Bus), while in the second category, in addition to Burton Wayne, can be placed, for example, Mac (In Dubious Battle), Uncle John (The Grapes of Wrath) and Mrs. Pritchard (The Wayward Bus).

Mrs. Pritchard is, in fact, representative of one of the archetypal Steinbeck females; the wife who refuses her husband his conjugal rights, or, at best, submits coldly and unresponsively to his embraces. One gains the impression that the majority of marriages in Steinbeck’s fiction are physically unsatisfactory. Even those of the idealized mother figures (perhaps not surprisingly) seem curiously sexless. These husbands and wives never seem to kiss each other or exchange much outward show of affection: they are merely companions or partners of a
contract in which the mechanical act of coition is a recognized and unavoidable adjunct. One has only to consider many of the short stories in *The Long Valley* (1938), most of which were written in the early 1930s, to appreciate that Steinbeck’s jaundiced perspective on the married state dates back to the beginning of his literary career.  

Mark Spilka has written perceptively of Steinbeck’s own possible early acquired and deep-rooted general animosity toward women, and it cannot be denied that an attitude suggesting this permeates through into his writings. All too often, his female characters are presented in unfavourable light, culminating, of course, in 1952 with the somewhat sensationally overdrawn portrait of Cathy (Kate) in *East of Eden*, a woman altogether devoid of conjugal and maternal instincts, and unremittingly adept at debasing for her own profit and vicarious satisfaction the natural sex urges of the male. There is, indeed, from the opposite angle, a certain unpleasant insistence in the manner in which many of Steinbeck’s men tend to regard women solely as a means by which they can relieve their physical needs. Again, this attitude can be traced back to *Cup of Gold*. Henry Morgan looks upon the mulatto, Paulette, “as a delicate machine perfectly made for pleasure, a sexual contraption.” When she asks him if he loves her Morgan tells her brutally: “‘Why you are just a little animal a pretty little golden animal, for sure, but a form of flesh—no more.’” It is the same sort of attitude that Jim Moore adopts toward his wife, Jelka: “She was so
much like an animal that sometimes Jim patted her head and neck under the same impulse that made him stroke a horse." 45

It could be suggested that having as it were, purged Cathy (Kate) from his system, he was able to view them in his system. Steinbeck was finally able to view them in his subsequent books in a softer and more sympathetic light. This change of attitude can possibly also be seen to be linked with the event of his third marriage in 1950 to Elaine Scott. His third marriage was patently the most contented as well as the longest (it was terminated only by his death in 1968) of his marital relationships. Unfortunately, concurrent with this new stability in his private life, his predilection for sentimentality and whimsy, which had at various times in the past diluted and in some instances ruined the vigour of his work, began to run riot, so that in his final novel the loving epithets exchanged between Ethan and Mary Hawley, while of a kind which would be perfectly natural uttered in the privacy of the marital bedroom, seem, when set down in cold print, almost unbearably coy and embarrassing.

If Steinbeck was conscientious in stating the themes of his novels, he was equally conscientious about his style and technique. What strikes the reader on reading his works is that he does not fall in line completely with some of the modernists' known penchant for stylistic devices such as stream-of-consciousness, surrealism, filmic devices, Collage and Montage, painting techniques like Cubism, the
techniques of contracting the space, linguistic devices of missing connectives etc. In his narrative techniques, he does not deviate altogether from the traditional methods of narration, but he bring in modern devices strictly in accordance with the progression of the story, depiction of characters, description of the outer scene or landscape or depiction of the whole psychological world in the mind of his characters. Since he combines the outer and the inner, the physical and the psychological, the social and the spiritual worlds at hand, he modifies the tradition and adds his individual talent combined with the use of modernist devices to make his style fitting for his works.

Steinbeck was very sensitive to words and verbal expressions. He did not believe that the language of literature is different from the language of the people as they speak it. So instead of turning to the language of written English or American books, he turned straight away to the living men and women around him, and introduced in his books the language actually spoken by them in different situations. He believed that language is the gross form of psychological currents of thought and feeling. It, therefore, must be both an individual and a social phenomenon. This kind of thinking helped him in tapping the living sources of language. Besides language, he also felt it necessary to make use of imagery and symbolism to draw parallels between the psychological reality and the physical reality. His imagery and his
language are functional in the sense that they represent transcendence from the mere representation or narration of human activities.

Steinbeck, as has been stated earlier, was a voracious reader. In a letter in 1936 he admitted the deep impact left on his mind by certain books such as *Crime and Punishment*, *Madame Bovary*, parts of *Paradise Lost* and *The Return of the Native*. He also admitted the profound effect of the works of Anglo-Saxon and old and middle period. He was charmed by Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*. His *Cup of Gold* is his experiment with the rich variety of language and is an admixture of a literary and spoken style. According to Peter Lisca: “If one comes to this first novel by way of Steinbeck’s later fiction, the most striking thing, apart from historical setting, is its prose style, which often seems indebted to Elizabethan drama and particularly to Shakespeare... Often the echoes are not so specific, but the tone, imagery, and accent of Renaissance drama are there.... A more accurate estimate of Steinbeck’s early prose style can be obtained from those passages which he writes in propria persona, especially descriptions of nature...”

The learned critic has further observed that Steinbeck’s style in *Cup of Gold*, in the main, is “a literary” style full of personifications and “pathetic fallacies”, so it is “archaic” *Cup of Gold* was Steinbeck’s major experiment not only with the thème of temptation and fall but also with the narrative technique and prose style. The
narrative mode in the book is essentially that of the omniscient author. But at the same time by way of dramatic mode he develops the story through dramatic scenes and dialogue form. This narrative mode is suitable in that it helps the author in transporting his readers into the romantic world of historical past by way of opening up imaginative vistas. He first takes the reader to the geographical location in which the story of Henry Morgan, the young boy, begins. His introduction in this novel as in his later novels begins with a kind of communicative initiation into the microcosm of the novel—Salinas, California. To minimize the impression of the artificial mode of omnipresence of the author, the dramatic form of representation and dialogues between characters are increasingly used. In such moments, Steinbeck gives the impression of having withdrawn himself from the scene like a dramatist. But as the story in *Cup of Gold* is complicated, he makes use of the technique of flash back also. When Morgan left his home, his mother dreams about the past. "He was being baptized in a long white dress... But could she trust this foolish young curate not to let the baby fall while she went?" Again, the scene of Morgan's death is made highly captivating by way of making his consciousness travel backward and forward like the focus of a camera-eyes in a highly confused and complicated world of impressions, forming, reforming and deforming themselves into concrete images. At the same time, it combines the technique of stream-of-consciousness flowing intermittently in the half
blocked consciousness of Henry. It is more than a simple narration; it is a kind of psycho-analytical technique of making a clinical examination of a fragmented human consciousness. At the same time, it is made parallel to the filmic devices of dimming, dissolving, fading in and fading out. For example:

Then he saw that the little beings were crouching before an approaching form... Why, it is Elizabeth... Henry had noticed a peculiar thing. If he looked steadily at one of the crouched, faceless beings, it disappeared... He looked for Elizabeth, but she, too had disappeared. In her place there was a red smouldering ember, and the light was dying out of it. 49

In his narrative mode Steinbeck makes use of the dramatic element in *Cup of Gold* to add to the tragic and emotional intensity of the scenes or to introduce unconventional ideas about sex. For example, the scenes of war, quarrels and crises are all represented rather than narrated. His concept of a ‘free woman’ is introduced through the dialogue of Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris. But the most important narrative technique used in this novel is ‘impressionistic’ technique. This is a necessary device to project the psychological reality or the working of the mind and consciousness of his characters. It is particularly used towards the end of the novel when in spite of outward integration, the forces of disintegration are at work in the mind and soul of Henry Morgan; “Sir Henry was staring at the ceiling. For an hour he had been puzzled with this mysterious ceiling. Nothing
supported it in the middle. Why did it not fall? It was late. And the picture of his wife being modified in his mind, "she is very near to God" and "It is terrifying to see a woman's soul shining through her eyes. So he was to die." It is the picture of his inner hollowness, spiritual chaos, and psychological confusion—the fruit of his misguided ambition and misdirected energies. But the best scene showing the use of impressionistic technique is the war scene. In this scene, Steinbeck juxtaposes the outer and the inner scenes. For example, when Henry Morgan shouts to his soldiers, "Throw down the walls! Let no two stones stand together!" There follows in brackets the scene of a woman which impinges on his mind, (There is a woman in the *Cup of Gold* and she is lovely as the sun)." Again he cries, "then put his feet in the fire—why, he is a brazen fool! Break his arms! —He will not tell? Put the whip cord about his temples! —Oh, kill him! Kill him and stop his screaming—Perhaps he had no money.' And this is juxtaposed with, "(there is a woman in Panama-)", which finds completion after the second command "kill the prisoners!" to "(-She is lovely as the sun)" and again with "(La Santa Roja is in Panama)." On the whole, the narrative method is direct and in the third person. Steinbeck does not enter the novel by way of a character a commentator or a reporter. However, his narrative techniques in this novel are in the experimental stage, which were to become some of the finest in his art of fiction in his later works.
To a God Unknown marks the next stage of development of his prose style and narrative style. The author directly moves on to acquaint the reader with the hero, Joseph Wayne, and his place in the clan and the society, his journey from his homeland to the West and his future growth. It is clear that in this novel the author remained occupied to the end with the personality and consciousness of Joseph Wayne. The result of that there is nothing—objects, images, symbols, descriptions, deliberation, scenes and characters—that does not directly or indirectly contribute to the evolution and emergence of this central character from a mere farmer to a prophet of his new faith. Every incident from the copulation of the cows and bulls to the falling of the rains, from the death of Elizabeth to Joseph’s adultery with Rama, is made a part of our and Joseph’s understanding and knowledge of the basic unity of life. There is nothing in the novel that can be called superfluous. Steinbeck’s economy of language is remarkable and the whole novel seems to be a single organism. There is not a single loose thread or digression in the novel. Joseph’s consciousness is made central to the whole fabric and Steinbeck performs difficult task of the author performing a kind of strict literary ritual.

The story is told in the third person, but this time it is told more in terms of communicative experience than in terms of sequential chain of events. Experience is communicated through an entry into the consciousness of Joseph, his emotional, philosophical and mystical
feelings and visions, coupled with delicately drawn pictures of natural objects and natural phenomena, animals and the land with its possibility of changing from barrenness into fertility and vice-versa. Man and nature are seen to be inseparable, and the changes in the land and the seasons are dependant on the inner, moral and spiritual condition of man. This makes the use of symbolic imagery necessary. The descriptive paragraphs about nature and natural scenes are made an integral part of the whole scheme of the novel. For example; "The Winter came in early that year... The black birds swarmed and flew away in twinkling clouds... The frost came in to the valley of Our Lady one night and burned the willows yellow and the dogwood red." Nature is made to be playing its phenomenal role within and outside his characters. Peter Lisca observes;

Frequently in his works Steinbeck interrupts the flow of his narrative to insert a descriptive passage, often set off as a paragraph, depicting some predatory incident in nature. An owl may be seen pouncing on a rodent, a hawk striking a rabbit...Always, they throw light on the moral structure of that ultimate reality with which man is consanguineous—Nature. Symbols and symbolic imagery make the novel a great work of art and yet they are nowhere forced or deliberately introduced. Language, sentence-structure, words and other lingual expressions modify themselves according to the communicative system aiming at representing experience in whatever form it takes in the mind of
Joseph, Elizabeth, Rama and other characters. Style is free from inflexibility, rigidity, and mannerism. The largest number of images are derived from nature, common-day life and Christian theology. *To A God Unknown* shows the maturing powers of Steinbeck as a great literary artist.

*The Pastures of Heaven* is Steinbeck’s experiment in telling the whole story in the form of a sequence of independent stories which also form a part of a single pattern. All the stories are about the life of people in the valley, constituting a certain social order. But they are so organized that in each story the Munroes figure in one way or the other and bring each story to its completion. *The Pastures of Heaven*, however, is not a novel because many stories in it are to a great extent autonomous in structure. Each story, however, is made to throw light on one aspect of the social structure, its harmony and its subsequent disharmony. The volume is significant in providing the novelist the opportunity to study and write the smallest psychological, and social event that in its ultimate effect causes significant breakdowns. The author has gained greater power of controlling and ordering his materials. The tone and tenor of a potential humorist also seems to begin intermittently in this volume.

*Tortilla Flat* is a work of an extremely cautious artist. F.W. Watt observes that Steinbeck “was fully preoccupied with the novelist’s craft and somewhat concerned with the immediate reactions of readers and
critics to *Tortilla Flat*". The fact is that his *Cup of Gold* and *To A God Unknown* had not invoked favorable criticism. This made him more conscious about his future works. The mock Arthurian saga of the poor paisanos marks the end of his literary apprenticeship. It is written in a mock-epic style employing the whole paraphernalia of mock-epic devices. The story is narrated in the third person by the author and the episodic structure of *The Pastures of Heaven* is retained to ‘grow into novel’, further including ‘interchapters’. There is use of a dignified expression for the exploits of Danny and his friends, King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table and their heroic exploits are down-scaled; ironic parallels and ironic contrasts are increasingly used and ironic tone is maintained throughout. Peter Lisca points out that

mock-epic tone is also obvious in the chapter headings; ... Within the narrative itself, this spirit is sustained by the author’s occasional interruptions; ... As in the speech of Hemingway ... part of the effect results from translating the foreign idiom directly into English. Steinbeck, however, relies less than Hemingway on direct translation alone, often recreating in English the very accents of the characters’ speech." The learned critic further points out that the function of language is very crucial in *Tortilla Flat*.

*The Long Valley*, like *The Pastures of Heaven*, is a collection of stories and its episodic structure highlights Steinbeck’s love of the short-story form. *The Long Valley* shows that these stories represent
wide range of techniques and subject matter. Each story has a complex structure in that it does not yield its meaning or even its theme easily. Under the explicit surface meaning, there is embedded at the symbolic and deeper level the implicit and deliberately unarticulated story of the characters' emotional, psychological and sexual proclivities. That constitutes Steinbeck's story in essence. All verbal and lingual expressions seem at times to be inadequate to express the essential experience conveyed. The Snake, The White Quail and Chrysanthemums exemplify the author's style of casting the essentials of his materials into stories and doing away with much of the inessential materials. In this respect, he is modern in his art of storytelling. The narrative art in these stories brings out Steinbeck's main concern with reality as it takes shape in the mind of his characters and the experience they have. We also find here a symbolic juxtaposition of the inner and outer landscapes. The inner state of Pepe in Flight is paralleled with his meeting the wild animals in their descending order, the well-made and maintained garden of Mary Teller is paralleled with her self-imposed sexual repression and egotistic sense of purity. Sometimes experience is communicated through the flight and physical death of an animal like the mare in The Promise. Incidents function as significant means of communication such as the words, "Jody ... the buzzards didn't kill the Pony. Don't you know that?" spoken by Carl Tiffin in the Gift. Again the death of red pony is associated with
violence, pain and disgust in The Promise. The style of the stories in
*The Long Valley* is perfectly suited to their theme and subject-matter.
What strikes the reader on reading *In Dubious Battle* is almost the total
absence of descriptions of nature, repeatedly met with in his earlier
works. He develops a matter-of-fact prose style in his treatment of the
theme of struggle between the labourers and the employers. This kind
of prose style was necessitated by the realistic treatment of the struggle
and the group-man theory. But still, the style does not jar the reader’s
sensibility. As a narrator, Steinbeck takes an objective and detached
position. It is through the dramatic technique that the reader is brought
into direct contact with the characters’ mind. The characters reveal
themselves only through speech and physical gestures and movements.
Peter Lisca remarks, “Steinbeck’s ‘cold’ prose and his dramatic
presentation are important techniques for driving a wedge of
objectively not only between the author and his artifact, but also
between the artifact and its audience”. ⁵⁸ Besides, Steinbeck introduces
Doc Burton, who represents non-teleological thinking. Through him,
Steinbeck introduces his theory of group-man and the biological theory
of man; “A man in a group isn’t himself at all, he’s a cell in an
organism...May be group-man gets pleasure when individual men are
wiped out in a war”⁵⁹ Steinbeck also introduces his knowledge of
marine biology and natural laws to make *In Dubious Battle* a modern
work of art.
*Of Mice and Men* was written in the play form. Peter Lisca points out that whereas in *In Dubious Battle*,

the personalized protagonists were easily absorbed into a greater pattern because that pattern was physically present, ... in *Of Mice and Men* the protagonists are projected against a very thin background and must suggest or create this larger pattern through their own particularity. To achieve this, Steinbeck makes use of language, action, and symbol as recurring motifs. All three of these motifs are presented in the opening scene, are contrapuntally developed the story, and come together again at the end.⁶⁰

These three motifs build up a strong pattern of inevitability. The book attests Steinbeck’s greater control and power of organization of his materials into a well-made fictional and thematic structure. The story begins with the pursuit of George and Lennie for the fulfillment of their dream and comes full circle when the dream is shattered, Lennie is killed and George returns all alone.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a very ambitious work. It deals with the journey of the migrant labourers from the dust-bowl to California, their sufferings and their tortuous existence there. It is a very significant record of Steinbeck’s attitude and of human conditions which were to be used as materials for his great novels. The extremes of poverty, suffering, depression and injustice are vividly depicted in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In a sense he was hoping that the projection of the microcosm will define the outlines of the macrocosm. As a result of seeing so
much suffering, his tone has come down from satire to compassion. He puts on the tone of a down-right realistic writer in his narration of the story of human suffering. He gives factual details including psychological and sociological actions and reactions. The materials of the novel presented the difficult problem of structure, so he had to include philosophical interchapters concerned with The Great Depression. The interchapters perform the function of presenting the social background to enlarge the pattern of action represented by the Joad family. Then there are intercalary chapters (19, 21, 25) that provide historical information regarding the development of land-ownership in California and the emergence of the migrant labour. Throughout the sixteen inter-chapters are found scattered, occasional paragraphs which present the philosophy or message to which the modern situation gives rise. The novel shows that there is a general correspondence between the material of each intercalary chapter and material of current narrative portion. The chapter that deals with the migrant’s life on the highway lies interspersed with the narrative of the Joads’ journey. The novel ends with the description of the rain and the flood in the last intercalary chapter. The novel is a triumph of fictional art. The interchapters are closely integrated into a total structure along with an intricate interweaving of specific details. Peter Lisca observes: “Every chapter is locked into the book’s narrative portion by specific cross-reference, which amplifies the Joads’ typical actions to the dimensions
of a communal experience.” According to Joseph Warren Beach, each speaker in the novel is like ‘the chorus in a Greek Tragedy’ The novel shows Steinbeck’s command of prose-style. Symbols and symbolic images such as of the turtle, the dog, the flood, the rain and the dust give thematic and structural organization to the novel. Images of colours; red, grey, green, ink, white, brown are used to symbolize the state of degeneration of growth both of the earth and of human characters. Peter Lisca demonstrates the similarity between the language of the Old Testament and Steinbeck’s prose style in this novel and comments that “the parallel grammatical structure of parallel meanings, the simplicity of diction, the balance, the concrete details, the summery sentences, the reiterations- all are here ... Except for the terms of machinery, the passage might be one of the Psalms” The novel certainly marks Steinbeck’s achievement as an artist with command over style and language and the skill of organizing chaotic and disparate materials into an organic structure.

*Sea of Cortez* is not a piece of fiction but a ‘leisurely journal of informal speculation.’ It is a scientific book in which his language has the economy, appropriateness and exactness of a scientific work. It is loaded with scientific terminology. Biological, zoological and physiological terms are woven into the narrative. Though *Sea of Cortez* is not a work of pure fiction, it has a kind of fictional mode of narration. It is important from another point of view also-the point of
view of objectivity, which dispenses with preconceptions and conclusions. A kind of thinking ‘technique’, or ‘non-teleological technique is developed. What the non-teleological thinker really experiences, according to Steinbeck, is not a loss of feeling or emotion, but an ‘immense expansion’. The book is full of analogies between human and animal life. Sea imagery is abundantly employed.

_Cannery Row_ further illustrates Steinbeck’s use of non-teleological theory of writing. The narrative has a wide sweep and converges on the central character, Doc. Doc is himself a scientific, technical and detached person. The tone adopted is at times satirical, particularly when the diseased society of _Cannery Row_ comprising of ‘tigers with ulcers’ and ‘blind jackals’ is contrasted with Mac and the boys. His treatment of Dora and her Bear Flag Restaurant is again an example of objective writing. The author does not walk into the book to pass comments. The book is free from personal judgment. It is not only that Steinbeck suspends his judgement, even the reader gains nothing more than an ambivalent view of life in this book.

By the time Steinbeck came to write _The Pearl_ in 1945, he had grown into a very mature artist and a great story-teller. He now succeeds in creating a microcosm out of a single incident which he had heard about an Indian boy who had found a pearl of great size by accident. He transforms this incident into a parable, modifies the thematic pattern and imbues it with symbolic meaning. _The Pearl_ is
created as a symbol of temptation, but the symbolism is very close to realism. Throughout the novel, the external shape of the broken landscape and the internal psychological landscape of Kino are artistically juxtaposed. The sea-short with all its sea-imagery is made to stand for the lust, sense of possession and selfishness of Kino. Animal imagery in the novel is employed to function as suggestive of the evil within and without Kino. The parabolic design of *The Pearl* is given the dimension of a credible human adventure. The prose style is flexible which serves both as a technique and a powerful medium of expression. Objectivity in narration is carefully maintained almost to the level of a camera capturing both the minute and the broad details.

*The Wayward Bus* has a complex structure and technique and has an equally complex level of meaning. The whole story of the fall, of the fallen, and of "on the way to redemption" is narrated in the complex way of putting an assortment of characters in a bus. The bus and the characters, the representatives of humanity, are deliberately made 'wayward'. The pattern is both artistic and symbolic. The journey from one place to the other in a wayward manner is made to stand for the journey of humanity from the dead past through the present towards the future. The bus is got stuck and this fact is used as a device to provide an opportunity for the dramatic revelation of each character from Van Brunt to John Chicoy. Unlike many of Steinbeck's novels, *The Wayward Bus* is related to action on the level of characters rather than
on the level of events. Its prose style is highly developed and dexterous. Scientific objectivity is brought to a point of further distinction as an artistic technique. Each sentence lights up step by step the scene and the characters, and the whole picture is built up in the style of a deft painter. Very much like a movie camera, there is a close-up, and then the broad background in which the action takes place. Peter Lisca observes: “this kind of camera-eye’ realism is used throughout, except for brief passages of omniscient narration in which author fills in the historical background of his characters” 64

_Burning Bright_, a play novelette, is said to be a failure. And according to Peter Lisca: “It is the failure of language” 65 Its failure of language is attributed to the novelist’s effort to forge and use ‘a kind of universal language’. Steinbeck himself wrote that it was not to sound like “ordinary speech, but rather by rhythm, sound, and image to give the clearest and best expression”66 But in spite of his best intentions and attempts, _Burning Bright_ failed because of the weakness of language, a language less convincing and less credible with reference to the characters using it.

_East of Eden_ and _The Winter of Our Discontent_ are the fruit of Steinbeck’s maturity as an untiring experimenter, innovator, and literary artist. In these two novels the narrative art consists mainly in telling a number of parallel stories, which coalesce into one. _East of Eden_ is embedded in the story of the fall and the rise of man in the
contextual framework of *The Bible*, the Christian and non-Christian philosophy and theology. *The Winter of Our Discontent* contains the Biblical, literary (Shakespearean) and spiritual story of the fall and the redemption of Man. It covers the New Testament just as *East of Eden* covers the Old Testament. *East of Eden* is also Steinbeck’s triumph of the art of structural design and complicated, epic-like fabric. The moral philosophy in the form of the story is brought out by narrating the story of three generations. The book begins with the personal family saga with strong Biblical overtones. Strinbeck’s greatness lies in his handling and ordering his diverse material in a cohesive and meaningful structural frame. The scale of the novel is enlarged to epical dimensions. The language, therefore, is also distanced from common-day language in keeping with the epic demands of the novel. The passages of pure description are not many because the story is told more in terms of human nature distanced from nature and natural way of life. In *The Winter of our Discontent*, the novelist once again turns to story of Man in terms of the Biblical pattern interpreted in the modern conceptual and contextual framework. The narrative pattern runs smoothly with occasional forays into the Biblical and symbolism of good Friday and the Passion of Christ is interwoven with the fictional narrative which tells the story of a modern Christian, Ethan Hawley. Steinbeck also makes use of the tarot cards in this novel which is compared to the use of tarot cards in Eliot’s “Wasteland”. The tarot
card is associated with the Hanged Man. Steinbeck takes pains to ensure that the reader understands what positions the Hanged Man is in when the card is placed in the table. When Margie views the Hanged Man, the card is in an upright position showing the man suspended upside down by the foot which indicates that Ethen will experience a period of sacrifice, submission, suffering and punishment. This symbolistic technique adds to the power of the novel by giving it a larger number of possible interpretations. Steinbeck also uses parallels from the past to emphasize the course of temptations, trials and salvation in the life of man. First of all, there are parallels drawn from the New Testament, the Crucifixion and the Ressurection of Christ, which is seen on a spiritual level. Another paralleled is drawn from Shakespeare’s Richard III. Like Richard, Ethan is determined to betray friends who had perfect trust in him, which starts the tortuous process of his moral downfall. The third parallel concerns the psychological level- his psychological dilemma in the face of temptations and trials. In this respect Ethan becomes every man. Steinbeck also makes a very effective use of other images and symbols such as the talisman, seashore, the cave and secret places.

Steibeck once wrote:

My experience in writing has followed an almost invariable pattern. Since by the process of writing a book I have outgrown that book, and since I like to write, I have not written two books alike ... if a
writer likes to write, he will find satisfaction in endless experimentation with his medium—techniques, arrangements of scenes, rhythms of words, rhythms of thought.67 Right from the first to the last novel, there is a consistent development in his prose style, in his structural designs, his symbology and his narrative patterns. He never repeats himself. There is a continuous and consistent growth in his conscious craftsmanship which makes him a singular writer among the writers of his generation and assures a permanent place for him in the world of American literature. His narrative technique in the final analysis is neatest to the natural expression of life in all its manifestations.

Steinbeck speaks to us with special immediacy because in a curious way he anticipated attitudes toward the human experience which have particularly engaged the intelligences of the young in recent years. Many of Steinbeck's characters seem to have been the forebears of the rebels who have gathered in centers of protest from Greenwich village to Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. What can the dissidents of Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday be called but dropouts from society who have the same reasons for rejecting old patterns of belief as do members of the hippie generation? On the negative side the credo of today's young revolutionaries seems, like that of Steinbeck, to have been influenced by a pervasive disillusionment with the gospel of success, by contempt for what seems
to them to be cynical commercialism, and by resentment of arbitrary authority. On the positive side, as their banners insist, they wish to be guided—again as were the group conscious residents of *Cannery Row*—by a preference for love over the destructive impulses of human nature. Steinbeck accepted as early as the 1930’s the obligation to take a stand in his writing against tendencies in the American way of life to which the campus rebels of the present have been making vigorous objection.

More than this, Steinbeck never forgot the crucial character of the confrontation between man and his destiny. In the least sober of his books, *Sweet Thursday*, he slipped in a statement which succinctly sets forth his own fundamental belief:

> Men seem to be born with a debt they can never pay no matter how hard they try. It piles up ahead of them. Man owes something to man. If he ignores the debt it poisons him, and if he tries to make payments the debt only increases, and the quality of his gift is the measure of the man.68

The novels, plays and short stories of this conscientious artist represent successive efforts to pay his dept to man. Wide in the range of their interests, diverse in mood, passionately concerned in their sympathies, they all celebrate the worth of man. For that integrity Steinbeck demands justice and respect; to that integrity he lends the support of his own conviction that all men everywhere are and must be inextricably identified with their kind. Much more clearly than in the instance of any other American writer of his time, Steinbeck’s
consistent effort to establish the dignity of human life offers the measure of the man.

Examples of his verbal skill reveal the secret of his method which was to make the simplest words and phrases flash into significance with seeming spontaneity. The quality of patience in one of his characters is established by use of the graphic simile “as enduring as a sea-washed stone”⁶⁹ When he describes a woman as being “humorless as chicken” one immediately sees the skittering and hears the feeble, repetitive complaints of a creature ridiculously, yet pathetically, at war with a frustrating environment. The same genius of making pictures of mental attitudes reveals itself in the suggestion that the mind of another character- a Chinese shopkeeper who has forever to protect himself against the connivers of Cannery Row- picked its way as delicately as cat through cactus”⁷⁰ One of Steinbeck’s many eager digesters of experience defines himself unforgettably when he says, “I eat stories like grapes”⁷¹ As easily recognizable as an elderly female relative of one’s own is the woman who has “a collection of small round convictions.” The idiot in the story “Johnny Bear” has only one interest in life which is to cadge drinks at a bar; he keeps reiterating the sounds “Whiskey.... Whis-key”, as Steinbeck says, “like a bird call.”⁷² By such small touches Steinbeck quickens his men and women into life.

Steinbeck is equally successful with metaphor in creating landscape. Every reason when he is drenching rains came at last to his
valley, the land, Steinbeck is inspired to say, "would shout with grass." A solitary visitor to a pool frequented by frogs remembers that "the air was full of their song and it was a kind of roaring silence". The modest poetry of surprise leaps out of such phrases as it does even more strikingly in descriptions of wild weather. An observer is warned of an approaching storm when he sees "a black cloud eating up the sky." In another such moment "a bristling, officious wind raked the valley." The device of making pictures of doleful situations is used to underscore tragedy: "Poverty sat cross-legged on the farm." Mood is established, the nature of man defined, drama propelled by verbal devices so skillfully suited to their purpose as to be almost unnoticeable in themselves. Yet unobtrusive as these inspirations, are they haunt the memory of the reader ever after.

According to Chaplin, Steinbeck would work in the morning, producing about two thousand words a day. The manuscripts he showed to Chaplin were remarkable for their neatness and bore few corrections. Steinbeck’s manuscripts are indeed undeniable unworked over in appearance and, as one reads them, one’s first reaction is one of astonishment that these are the texts which, untouched, eventually found their way into print. Nothing could be further from the truth. If one carefully compares the manuscripts with the published texts, it becomes apparent that, although they are essentially identical in overall concept, they are vastly different in the detail of their composition.
Such comparison reveals that Steinbeck’s prose style – which at times seems almost disarmingly spontaneous and casual, and which at its best is clear, simple, vivid, and immediate, possessing a subtle and distinctive rhythm which makes the reading of it such a satisfying aesthetic experience – achieves its most effective expression only by the application of iron artistic discipline and a great amount of detailed revision.

"I write because I like to write," Steinbeck told a British interviewer in 1965. "I find joy in the texture and tone and rhythm of words. It is a satisfaction like that which follows good and shared love."78 By then, of course, Steinbeck had been for many years criticized–sometimes justly, but more often unjustly–for the increasingly wooden manner of his writing. It cannot be denied that, viewed as a body, the postwar work Steinbeck published is markedly inferior, stylistically as well as in other respects, to the work he produced up to 1939. Basically, Steinbeck was an instinctive writer, in that his best work is that which apparently was initially conceived and committed to paper in a white-hot burst of creative energy. There is some evidence to suggest that The Grapes of Wrath may have been the first book he had really to struggle over and that he never wholly recovered from the experience.79 One also gets the impression time and time again, that while Steinbeck is always fully in control of his material in the first two-thirds of some of his full-length works, he
tends to lose a certain scenes of proportion and rushes through the final section almost as if he has become impatient to get this current work out of the way and behind him, already fixing his sights on the project that is to follow. ⁸⁰

A writer’s creative processes always make for rewarding study, and we are fortunate indeed to have *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* (1969) which affords some fascinating glimpse into Steinbeck’s working methods on one of his major books. The journal does not provide us with the whole story, however, for it covers only that period during which Steinbeck commenced and completed the initial manuscript draft of the novel. Steinbeck’s own comments on the work in progress indicate that, as apparently with all his work, the overall plan of *East of Eden* remained fundamentally unchanged in its metamorphosis from manuscript to published book. The facsimile of the first page of the original manuscript, reproduced as an endpaper to the first trade edition of *Journal of a Novel*, illustrates, on the other hand, how the prose has undergone a subtle, although occasionally radical, process of transmutation. The instinctive prose of these opening passages, near perfect in itself and poured out in a sort of creative orgasm, has been considered and reconsidered, molded in a variety of different ways to obtain the desired precise effect, pruned, expanded, rearranged to give smoothness of tone and of narrative line. As Steinbeck himself avowed:
... [East of Eden] is going to be much more carefully written than anything I have ever done. This book is very important to me. I am going to do no going back until the whole is completed but then it is going to be overhauled very very deeply. I shall insist on that.81

This process of deep overhauling, carried out during the nine or ten months which elapsed between the completion of the manuscript and the publication of the book in September 1952, is not recorded in Journal of a Novel. A publicity handout issued by Steinbeck's publishers, the Viking Press, in 1954, however, gives a useful picture of the intensive program of revision Steinbeck devoted to all his work, although it is possible that this is not exactly the method he used when working on East of Eden.

His first draft is always written in pencil, the sentences marching across the pages in surprising, neat, close-drill lines. When several chapters have been set down he reads from the manuscript into a tape recorder, and a stenographer makes a typed copy from the tape, on which he then makes his revisions. When the revised draft is complete it is retyped and he does a final reworking of it, after which a last typescript is made and sent off to ... his publishers.82

As Malcolm Cowley has observed, "diction is an essential part of the process, because what Steinbeck writes is a spoken prose."83 Cowley's observation is a valid one. Steinbeck always saw his role as a writer as an extension of the role of the storyteller of yore seated in a circle of men around a campfire. His prose retains the natural rhythms of speech, while maintaining the visual flow of words on the printed page. It has
the directness and the simplicity of the born storyteller’s art. Steinbeck eschewed obscurity in writing. “It is so hard to be clear,” he once wrote. “Only a fool is willfully obscure.”\textsuperscript{84} He admired Adlai Stevenson for his “clear, clean writing,” insisting that a man “cannot think muddled and write clear.”\textsuperscript{85} Stevenson’s prose style was one reason, and obviously a very valid reason at that, why Steinbeck so wholeheartedly supported the senator’s presidential campaign.

Steinbeck’s dialogue, although sometimes a little mannered (as in \textit{Of Mice and Men}) is not all literary as is, for example, that of Hemingway. Hemingway’s dialogue reads well on the page, but when read aloud often tends to sound painfully artificial. The conversation between the lovers Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley at the end of Chapter 19 of \textit{A Farewell to Arms} is supremely effective on the page, creating atmosphere and foreshadowing the novel’s tragic conclusion, but put into the mouths of actors it emerges rather pretentious, even ludicrous. Steinbeck’s dialogue (except that in \textit{Burning Bright}) is never artificial or pretentious when translated into the spoken idiom, and this, as correlative to the masterly storytelling, surely accounts largely for the success of the films which have been from Steinbeck’s works.

With \textit{Of Mice and Men} Steinbeck devised the experimental play-novelette form, “an attempt,” as he himself explained, “to write a novel that could be played from the lines, or a play that could be read.... The fact that this experiment was a failure, however is no proof
that such a book as I had wished to write cannot be written. I thoroughly intend to try it again."\(^86\) Steinbeck indeed wrote two more of these play-novelettes, *The Moon Is Down* and *Burning Bright*. The three books follow the basic construction of a stage play, the narrative at beginning of each chapter corresponding to the stage setting which precedes each scene of a play, detailed in description, partly expository in nature, and providing wherever necessary potted case histories of the characters (see, in particular, the opening of Chapter 2 of *The Moon Is Down*). As novels, they fail because their action is governed by the need to follow stage techniques, which in addition to imposing severe restrictions on the construction of the books, also raises occasional questions of credibility as undiluted theatricality keeps breaking through.\(^87\) Similarly, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Moon is Down* are not the artistic successes they could have been as stage plays because their intrinsic realism does not adapt altogether well to the traditional play form that Steinbeck uses, calling for a far more flexible and experimental theatrical medium in which to operate. Undoubtedly, although Steinbeck dubbed it "a failure," *Of Mice and Men* is the most accomplished of the play-novelettes. As an art form, the genre became progressively less successful. Of *Burning Bright*, little needs be said. Even Steinbeck conceded: "I guess I was wrong but I'm still glad I did it."\(^88\)
Steinbeck’s works are, as already indicated, more faithfully served by translation into the cinematic medium, which has both the breadth and the flexibility, unavailable on the stage, to give a fully unrestricted and effective interpretation. It is generally agreed, for instance, that *The Moon Is Down* made a far better film than it did a play. In fact, much of Steinbeck’s work seems to have been conceived in quasicinematic terms; the rapid succession of scenes, the panoramic expanses narrowing down to the specific detail, the unconventional viewpoint (e.g. the turtle in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the gopher in *Cannery Row*, and the fly in *The Wayward Bus*). It is not surprising that Steinbeck had a deep and abiding interest in films and film-making. The opening paragraphs of Chapter 27 of *East of Eden* provide an excellent example of this quasi cinematic technique: the preliminary bird’s-eye-view of the Salinas River, the camera zooming down to dwell on the rabbit sitting quietly on the bank, the cinematic shock of the arrow transfixed the creature, and then the camera view again widening, but only marginally, to encompass the world of the young Trask twins and to set the narrative under way once more.

Patently cinematic, too, is the opening paragraph of the novel *In Dubious Battle*:

> At last it was evening. The lights in the street outside came on, and the neon restaurant sign on the corner jerked on and -off, exploding its hard red light in the air. Into Jim Nolan’s room the sign threw a
soft red light. For two hours Jim had been sitting in a small, hard rocking-chair, his feet up on the white bedspread. Now that it was quite dark, he brought his feet down to the floor and slapped the sleeping legs. For a moment he sat quietly while waves of itching rolled up and down his calves; then he stood up and reached for the unshaded light. The furnished room lighted up – the big white bed with its chalk-white spread, the golden-oak bureau, the clean red carpet worn through to a brown warp.

The sleazy hotel or rooming-house bedroom with the neon sign flashing on and off outside the window has now become a movie cliché, but Steinbeck here uses the setting with masterly literary effect. The very first sentence of the book creates a sense of immediacy, so that the reader feels himself impelled headlong into the story. The obvious sense of overwhelming relief experienced by Jim that evening has arrived and the fact that he does not move from his chair until it is completely dark establishes, without any explanation being necessary, the possible fugitive nature of his circumstances. The austere, almost journalistic, style in which this paragraph and the whole book is written reflects the unrelenting world in which the characters exist, the unwavering didactic determination of the leading protagonists, the manifestations of violence which erupt again and again as a result of the situations coldly and deliberately engineered by the strike leaders in the Torgas Valley. This is Steinbeck's prose at its most uncompromising, simple in vocabulary and syntactic construction,
stripped down to the bare essentials in almost every way, devoid of purple patches, but containing those frequent and, as always, poetically vivid observations of nature:

The afternoon sun glanced on the tops of apple trees and then broke into stripes and layers of slanting light beneath the heavy branches, and threw blotches of sunshine on the ground. The wide aisles between the trees stretched away until the rows seemed to meet in a visual infinity. ⁹¹

It is a considerable advance on the rich, complex, literary prose, replete with personifications and metaphoric allusions, that Steinbeck was writing only a few years earlier in *Cup of Gold*:

The sun cut itself on a sharp hill and bled into the valleys. Long shadows of the peaks crept out into the fields like stalking grey cats. ⁹²

This somewhat overwrought prose of Steinbeck’s first book spills over into *To a God Unknown*, the next book Steinbeck was to write, although the third in order of publication, following *The Pastures of Heaven*. In *To A God Unknown*, however, he succeeded in keeping the riot of metaphors more under control and indeed, where they are used, having regard to the essentially pantheistic nature of the work, they tend to seem less unashamedly literary than they were in *Cup of Gold*, being here firmly integrated into the book’s emotional and philosophic patterns. In *To a Gold Unknown* there can already be detected the beginnings of Steinbeck’s mature prose style. It is also interesting to
note that most of the stories ultimately collected in *The Long Valley* were written around this time, for some of these stories, especially the four which comprise *The Red Pony* cycle, contain arguably the best prose that Steinbeck ever wrote.

*The Red Pony* has often been termed a children’s book, but it is certainly much more than that. It epitomizes all that Steinbeck desired to achieve in his writing, in that, on one hand, with its unsophisticated language and compelling narrative, it is a work which children can readily identify with and unreservedly enjoy on their own level, while on the other hand, with its wonderful evocation of childhood, its sharp and lovely observations of nature and its incisive explorations into the working of the human psyche, it is a work that holds deep meaning and wisdom for the adult reader.

Steinbeck’s unwasteful but vibrant style of those years is ideally suited to the short story medium and it is to be regretted that the magazine editors of the early 1930s apparently did not recognize his considerable talent in the genre. Had they done so, we may now have many more stories equal in distinction to those in *The Long Valley*. By the time Steinbeck again began writing short stories after the end of World War II his mature style had begun to disintegrate and those stories he did publish are little more than a pale reflection of the gems he published during the pre-war years.
Despite the danger of perhaps over-simplifying a thesis, it can be suggested that the development of Steinbeck's prose style after *To a God Unknown* is traceable with some fair consistency through *The Pastures of Heaven, The Long Valley* stories, *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*. With *The Grapes of Wrath*, that flawed masterpiece which is surely Steinbeck's greatest achievement, a sort of disintegration paradoxically does set in. As Peter Lisca has pointed out, "No other American novel has succeeded in forging and making instrumental so many prose styles." Lisca identifies two principal styles: the first redolent with Biblical resonances and the second echoing the harsh, staccato dissonances of the contemporary American scene, complete with what (for want of a better term) I shall call onomatopoeic rhythms, as, for example, in the square dance sequence in Chapter 23. The books subsequent to *The Grapes of Wrath* can be said to follow broadly these two stylistic courses: the psuedo- Biblical style, now much watered-down and sentimentalized, being continued in such works as *The Moon Is Down, The Pearl, Burning Bright*, and *East of Eden*, whilst the new and more abrasive style tends to predominate in *Cannery Row, The Wayward Bus, Sweet Thursday*, and *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

It is partly this overall uncertainty of style, with its increasing propensity toward imprecision of language and its lack of strength in sustaining or compensating for the occasionally somewhat inadequately
expressed and structured philosophic content of his work, which accounts for the comparative failure of so many of Steinbeck's post-war books. It must be recognized and admitted that, apart from his compelling narrative genius, style was, in many respects, the principal force unifying Steinbeck's work. When he either lost the ability to reproduce the mature style of the thirties or, deliberately abandoned it, because of his insatiable desire to experiment his stature as a writer because of his insatiable desire to experiment, his stature as a writer became sadly but inevitably diminished.

It is an undisputed fact that many of Steinbeck's friends, neighbours, and acquaintances have had cause from time to time to be disturbed, shocked or even incensed by the thinly-disguised portraits he drew of them as characters in his fiction. One gets the impression that throughout his literary career Steinbeck relied, perhaps to a greater extent than most authors do, on real people and true-life happenings and situations to provide him with the characters and the plots for his novels and short stories. In his last novel, for instance, Ethan Hawley recalls the time when, as a boy, he lost the lace in church to another boy named Skunkfoot Hill, who subsequently became an anthropologist "somewhere in the west."95 Five years after the publication of The Winter of Our Discontent, Steinbeck repeated the same story exactly in one of his Newsday "Letters to Alicia," this time purportedly as a factual episode in the author's own past. Steinbeck concludes this
ostensibly non-fictional account by relating how, many years after the incident, he met Skunkfoot Hill on a transcontinental train: "... I looked up from my book at a hauntingly familiar face. 'Bet you don't know me,' it said. 'Skunkfoot Hill?' I said. He retorted, 'Dr. Skunkfoot Hill, please.' Anthropologist, or some such vermin, he had become." Illusion and reality: where is the dividing line? Without attempting to disguise them, Steinbeck made the members of his mother's family, the Hamilons, leading characters in *East of Eden*, their real lives weaved into the fabric of the book and intermingled with the fictive lives of the Trasks. On one of two occasions, Steinbeck even briefly introduces his boyhood self as a character in the book. Significantly, the reader is left with the overall impression that the Hamilons do indeed seem more real than do the Trasks.

This is not to suggest that Steinbeck was incapable of realizing a fully-fictionalized character, although obviously it is impossible for us, without intimate knowledge of those friends, neighbours and acquaintances of his, to be at all certain which of Steinbeck's characters are based on living persons (and how accurately so based) and which of them are purely the creation of his imagination. Because we have the proof of his own non-fictional writings, we can safely say, however, that many of his characters, and quite often those that impress themselves most strongly on the reader's mind, are based on actual Steinbeck either knew personally or had heard about, such as the
paisanos of *Tortilla Flat*, the Munroes of *The Pastures of Heaven*, and Johnny Bear from the story that bears his name. The most obvious example of all is, as has already been noted, the characters of Doc in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*. As with the Hamiltons in *East of Eden*, there is very little attempt at disguise, and the portrait which Steinbeck draws of Ricketts in his valedictory essay, “About Ed Ricketts” is as true a portrait of Doc as the so-called fictional Doc is a portrait of Ricketts. As Steinbeck admits in his essay: “It is going to be difficult to write down the things about Ed Ricketts that must be written, hard to separate entities. And anyone who knew him would find it difficult. Maybe some of the events are imagined.” Again, one comes up against this fundamental ambivalence: illusion and reality, which is which? Ricketts also appears thinly disguised elsewhere in Steinbeck’s fiction, as the young Dr. Phillips in the short story “The Snake,” and as the somewhat mysterious Doc Burton in the novel *In Dubious Battle*.

Ricketts is not the only living person to make an appearance in fictive form in *Cannery Row* and the Pacific Biological Laboratory is not the only building transferred from reality into the pages of Steinbeck’s novel. As Ray A. March, in his fascinating little guide to the present-day *Cannery Row*, has noted:

*Dora, the community minded madam of the Bear Flag Restaurant,*

*was also fashioned from the life of a real *Cannery Row* character.*
Dora’s contemporary in real life was Flora Woods, operator of the Bear Flag, sometimes known as the Lone Star, a one-time Cannery Row bordello.... Lee Chong’s grocery is probably the most easily recognized. The name board is gone from the Chinese store, where Old Tennis Shoes whiskey could be bought for a few frogs, but the grocery is still present at 835 Cannery Row.... La Ida’s like Doc’s and Lee Chong’s is real. The name is ever the same as in the novel. 98

In exactly the same way, the whole of what is now popularly known as the “Steinbeck Country” provided Steinbeck with a rich and inexhaustible source of material for his books. The novels and short stories are redolent with descriptions of actual locales, sometimes given fictitious names, but more frequently identified by their real names; Salinas, Monterey, Carmel, Soledad, King City, Los Gatos, San Luis Obispo, Jolon, the Santa Lucia Mountains, the Gabilans, Pacific Grove—all are intensely evocative names to Steinbeck’s readers.

One of the criteria of any fictive work is measured by the extent of success the author attains in establishing immediacy of contact with his reader. This contact can be expressed as a cerebral and emotional bridge linking the reader with the author’s own unique view of life. In his finest work, Steinbeck, by some miraculous and seemingly casual and instinctive application of genius, establishes this immediacy of contact of a degree that few authors are able to achieve being unfolded on the printed page, intimately involved with the sights and smells and passions being described. It is a quasimystical experience, virtually
impossible to explain. Perhaps the nearest analogy is again that of the relationship subsisting between the enthralled listener and the born storyteller seated together at the campfire or before an open hearth on a winter’s night in the candle-lit tap-room of some eighteenth or nineteenth century alehouse.

The analogy need not seem all that far-fetched. It should be remembered that from an early age Steinbeck nourished an intense interest in Arthurian romance, and he was continually acknowledging his indebtedness to Malory’s great work, *The Morte d’Arthur*, for the profound influence it had both on his thinking and on his own writing. As M.C. Bradbrook has noted:

> Story-telling was the great art of the Middle Ages, and the Romance was a special form of this art. It was a long-continuing and popular form; the stories which Malory told were also in substance many hundreds of years old. They were ennobled by long tradition; they were, too, believed to be true history. But they represented at the same time an enlarged picture of contemporary life. This seems one way of defining the Romance. It gives an idealized version of the life of the knightly class. It is the warrior’s day-dream, designed for recreation (or ‘solace’) not instruction (or ‘doctrine’) and representing the average sensual man’s point of view. 99

This passage does, I would suggest, provide some indication of what, in one area at least, Steinbeck was endeavoring to accomplish in his fiction. It illuminates Steinbeck’s ambivalent use of the real and the imaginary, explains perhaps the “average sensual man’s point of view”
which he tends principally to adopt, and gives weight to his continual insistence that he wished to be read primarily for pleasure, although as a twentieth-century writer who arguably produced his finest work during the Depression era, it is perhaps too much to expect that he would avoid doctrinal issues altogether. Steinbeck sought to project the idealism of the chivalric code into the contemporary California scene, admittedly somewhat sentimentalizing it in the process and, almost paradoxically it seems, giving it its most potent and basic expression among the dropouts of *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*. Danny and Mack forming their own little conclaves in much the same manner as King Arthur established the brotherhood of the Round Table. It is in the light of such analogy that the series of "noble deeds" embarked upon by these latter-day California Knights of the Round Table (such as the rescuing of the Cortez family from starvation and the surreptitious planning of the surprise party for Doc, misdirected though these projects may sometimes prove to be with their unexpected and frequently disastrous side-effects) and the ruthless manner in which any member of the quasi-sacred circle is punished for misdemeanours against the group (the beating-up of Big Joe Portagee, for example) acquire a depth of meaning not immediately apparent from a superficial reading.

There are, however, let it be said, inherent dangers in attempting to extend the analogy too far, for one cannot altogether forget that
Danny and Mack and their respective companions, if not exactly members of the lowest stratum of society and loveable though Steinbeck may try to make them seem, are drunks, thieves, and wastrels and very low indeed down the social scale. It is clearly difficult, bearing this in mind, to identify them with the idealized figures of Malory's medieval heroes. There is little doubt, on the other hand, that the author himself entertained no such reservations and that Doc is echoing Steinbeck's own sentiments when he says, "' ... Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean'". Doc's observation parallels Brandbrook's statement that there is "something extraordinarily clean about Malory's world. Nearly all the knights are good..."  

Nevertheless, adopting a somewhat broader view, the analogy between the *Morte d'Arthur* and Steinbeck's fiction can stand closer scrutiny. Here is Brandbrook again describing the world of Arthurian romance:

> The characters in Romance are selected by age as well as class. They consist almost entirely of fighting men, their wives or mistresses, with an occasional clerk or an enchanter, a fairy or a fiend, a giant or a dwarf....There are very few old men or women, almost no infants or children. It is also a world in which family relationship, though they exist, are usually of comparatively little significance ... the relations of husband to wife is a feudal and not a personal one ... The deep relationships in this world are those of knight and vassal, or its mirror image of lady and lover; and of
these, the former is in Malory the most important, the last exhibiting the same virtue of fidelity which is more amply mirrored in the comradeship of arms. There is no doubt that even in the loves of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere, the masculine loyalties triumph.¹⁰¹

So it is too in Steinbeck’s fictive world, predominantly male-orientated as it is, with its Henry Morgans, Jim Nolans, and Tom Joads fighting their way in that world for gain, for political belief or merely for survival; its Tularections, Johnny Bears and Lennie Smalls burdened with their physical and mental abnormalities and pathetically existing in a mainly uncaring society; and its occasional fiends, with Cathy Ames as the extreme larger-than-life example.

The theme of the intimate, yet ostensibly asexual, relationship which can exist between two men living temporarily in physical or psychological isolation away from the community is also peculiarly American. One can cite, as Leslie A. Fiedler does in Chapter XI of his Love and Death in the American Novel (1960), Natty Bumpo and Chingachgook in The Deerslayer, Ishmael and Queequeg in Moby Dick, and Huck and Jim in Huckleberry Finn. It is a theme which is constantly recurring in Steinbeck’s fiction, from Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris in Cup of Gold to Ethan Hawley and Danny Taylor in The Winter Of Our Discontent, although-unlike Cooper, Melville and Twain, and with the possible exception of Ramas and Willie in To a God Unknown—Steinbeck introduces no element of Platonic
miscegenation. In his book, Fiedler presents a case for detecting an element of latent homosexuality in these sort of relationships and it is worth noting that Steinbeck does in fact endow two all-male relationships (those of Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris, and Mac and Jim Nolan) with somewhat deeper implications. Steinbeck provides clear evidence of Morgan’s ambivalent sexual tastes again and again. We are told specifically at one point that Morgan “knew... how much he had come to love the young lieutenant, knew that he could not bear to lose [him]”\textsuperscript{102} The relationship comes to a violent end, when, shortly after his rejection by La Santa Roja, Morgan, in a moment of jealousy and self-disgust, shoots Coeur de Gris. Similarly throughout \textit{In Dubious Battle} there are several indications that, as far as Mac is concerned, his feelings for Jim may not, after all, be entirely asexual in origin or intent. When eventually Jim accuses him; “You protect me all the time, Mac. And sometimes I get the feeling you’re not protecting me for the Party, but for yourself?” \textsuperscript{103} Mac does not deny it, but turns away in confused anger.

From all accounts, both as a child and as a young man, Steinbeck was an omniverous reader. He had the immense good fortune to be raised in a household in which the pick of the world’s literature was readily available to him: the works of such British and European writers as Bunyan, Milton, Addison, Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and
Thomas Hardy, as well undoubtedly as the giants of nineteenth century American literature. Every writer consciously or unconsciously borrows from the writers who have preceded him, and in this Steinbeck was no exception. There is, of course, a certain inevitability about the process. In a study as brief as this, it is not possible to develop this line of investigation extensively. While it is perhaps offensive to speculate too freely about possible specific borrowings, two examples may be posited. There are, for instance, certain similarities between the opening image in the short story “The Chrysanthemums” of the winter fog sitting “like a lid on the mountains” and making “of the great valley a closed pot”, and the initial-image of “the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky” which is “as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor” in The Return of the Native, Steinbeck’s own favourite among Hardy’s novels. In the same way, with the insistent repetition of the word “dust” in Chapter I of The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck employs the same literary device Dickens employs in the first chapter of Bleak House, with his equally obsessive use of the word “fog”. Thus it can be said for certain that Steinbeck constantly throughout his literary career experimented with form and made every possible effort to ventilate his set-notions and large sweep of imagination in the best possible effective manner like a real creative artist.
REFERENCES:


4- Ibid., p. 203.


13- In a letter to A Grove day dated November 5, 1929, Steinbeck refers to *Cup of Gold* as an “immature experiment” and recognize the influence of Cabbell.


15- Ibid., p.178.


17- *The Grapes of Wrath*, p.100.

18- Ibid., p. 161.


21- *Cup of Gold*, p. 52.


23- *To a God Unknown*, p.8.
24- Ibid., p.133.
25- *Cup of Gold*, p.106
26- *To a God Unknown*, p.134.
27- Ibid., p.179.
32- Ibid., p.33.
34- Ibid., p. 230.
35- Ibid.
37- *Cup of Gold*, p.131.
38- *To a God Unknown*, p.20.
39- Ibid., p.22.
40- As the Captain in *Cannery Row* so feelingly observes: “My Wife is a Wonderful Woman ... Most Wonderful Woman. Ought to of been a man. If she was a man I wouldn’t of married her” (CR, p.58.)
The Allens in "The Chrysanthemums," the Tellers in "The White Quail," the Randalls in "The Harness," and Mike and his wife in "The Vigilante" are all examples of men and women trapped in unhappy marriages in which the sexual element is either obviously or ostensibly almost non-existent. Certainly, in each case the marriage is childless.


*Cup of Gold*, p.65.

Ibid., p.70.


Ibid., p.36.

*Cup of Gold*, p.28.

Ibid., p.157.

Ibid., p.153.

Ibid., p.154.

Ibid., p.83.

*To a God Unknown*, pp. 93-94.


56- The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 80.

57- The Red Pony, p. 35.


59- In Dubious Battle, pp. 104-105.

60- The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 134.

61- Ibid., p. 158.

62- Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction, 1920-1940


64- Ibid., p. 247.

65- Ibid., p. 256.

66- Steinbeck, “Critics, Critics, Burning Bright,” Saturday
    Review, Nov. 11, 1950, p. 44.

67- Ibid., pp. 46-47.

68- James Gray, John Steinbeck (Minneapolis: University of

69- Ibid., p. 39.

70- Ibid.

71- Ibid.

72- Ibid.

73- Ibid.

74- Ibid., pp. 39-40.
75- Ibid., p.40.
76- Ibid.
77- Ibid.
81- Ibid., p.42.
87- For Example, in Chapter 6 of The Moon is Down, Mollie Morden’s house is visited one evening in rapid succession by Annie, Lieutenant Tonder, Mayor Orden, Dr. Winter, and the
Anders brothers, simply to comply with the scenic limitations and stage mechanics of the conventional play medium.

88- Journal of a Novel, p.205.

89- In Dubious Battle, p.1.

90- The Moon Is Down and The Pearl are other Steinbeck’s longer works which have this opening element of immedacy Steinbeck’s novels, however, as a rule open in the traditional nineteenth century novelistic manner with extended descriptive and expository passages.

91- In Dubious Battle, p. 45.

92- Cup of Gold, p.20.


94- Note, for instance, Steinbeck’s frequent use of the imprecise noun “thing “ in the opening pages of Chapter 2 of Cup of Gold, and his extensive and over excessive use of the same word throughout the whole of Chapter VIII of The Winter of Our Discontent.


96- “Letters to Alicia”, Newsday, February 26, 1966. (n.p.)

97- The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p.x.


100- Ibid., p. 24.


102- *Cup of Gold*, p. 129.

103- *In Dubious Battle*, p. 246.