CHAPTER 1

JOHN STEINBECK: AN INTRODUCTION
John Steinbeck (Feb. 27, 1902-Dec. 21, 1968) grew up in California, where grandparents on both sides of the family had settled in the mid-1800s. While travelling in Germany in the 1850s, his paternal grandmother, Almira Ann Dickson, a New Englander, met and fell in love with a young cabinetmaker named John Adolph Grossteinbeck. They were married in the holy land. Shortly before the Civil War, they came to America, lived in New Jersey, and then in Florida, where Steinbeck's father, John Ernest was born. After serving briefly with the confederate army, the grandfather moved with his family back to New England, and then, he left for California, settling in 1874 near Hollister, where he was soon joined by his family. The grandfather operated a flour-mill and along with other family members gained a reputation for honesty and industry. In 1890 John Ernest Steinbeck, tall and strong, moved to King City, became a book keeper and in 1892 married Olive Hamilton, a young school teacher.

Olive Hamilton's Irish parents had left Ulster in 1851 and appeared in central California soon thereafter, while the early whereabouts of the family remains obscure. It is known that Olive was born in San Jose in 1866. Subsequently, the Hamiltons, homesteaded a sprawling 1750-acreland East of King City. If the fictional account of *East of Eden* (1952) reliable, the family had a difficult time growing crops and raising cattle on this land, which had little water and well holes that often dried up in the summer heat. But the vigorous,
imaginative father overcame the challenges and shortcomings of the land, and Olive’s mother, strict and practical, instilled in members of the growing, close-knit family respect for God, Bible and facts.

John Steinbeck was born on February 27, 1902, in a middle class family living in Salinas, California. Salinas is an agricultural community in the middle of a fertile Valley south of San Francisco. There are mountains on both sides of the Valley and Pacific Ocean is not far away. He, thus, grew up between the Gabilan Mountains in the Eastern edge of the Salinas Valley and the austere Santa Lucias to the west. In the opening pages of *East of Eden*, Steinbeck explained his childhood reaction to these two ranges of mountains, a reaction that would have powerful effect on much of Steinbeck’s writing:

*I remember that the Gabilan Mountains to the east of the Valley were light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation so that you wanted to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains with a brown grass-love. The Santa Lucias stood up against the sky to the west and kept the Valley from the open sea, and they were dark and brooding — unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I can not say, unless it could be that the morning came over the peaks of Gabilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias. It may be that the birth and death of the day had some part in my feeling about the two ranges of mountains.*¹

The above statement makes obvious that the eastern mountains in Steinbeck’s fiction represent the unknown, safe world, while the western mountains are a land of death. To enter the Santa Lucias is to
confront death in one form or another. There is no exception to this in Steinbeck’s fiction. Death in these mountains, however, is not simply an end; it is a transcendent experience in which one may achieve a new world vision and become recognizably and even consciously a part of the “Whole” which is unknowable except by “being it, by living into it.”

The house in which Steinbeck was born was a large Victorian structure with the familiar gables and embellishment of the period. A few years after his family needed a spacious house, this one was to serve the Steinbecks for some thirty years. The family itself proved to be unusual, at least for writers of that generation because disruptive tensions were seemingly few and family life appeared to be secure and happy. The father was a quiet, kindly man involved in family affairs interested in his children. He was the first to recognize his son’s unusual talents and to express confidence in his promise as a writer. The mother, energetic and active in club work, hoped that her boy would grow up to be a banker. When she realized that John’s abilities and dreams lay elsewhere, she firmly believed that some day he would become a successful writer like Tarkington, a novelist popular at that time. Both parents regarded cultural influences as important and enjoyable aspects of life. Several times in a year the family traveled by train to San Francisco to see plays and attend concerts. As the parents were well educated and loved books, it was the custom after dinner for
everyone to gather in the sitting room and listen to father and mother take turns reading the popular Alice books, adventure stories by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), or tales from Greek and Roman mythology. On his ninth birthday, John was delighted to receive from his father a copy of *Morte' Arthur (1485)*. It was his first book, and next to *the Bible* it proved to be the most influential. In later years writing what most readers regarded then and later as comic novels or social-protest fiction, Steinbeck often drew upon the Arthurian tales for ideas or materials for portraying character or shaping action.

Steinbeck's boyhood was only occasionally bookish and rarely sheltered. Among the boys in that part of town, he was usually the leader—the one to start a secret society, battle imaginary foes, or lead a gang into a showdown with a rival group. A slough nearby was often a site for mud battles or fights. On more than one occasion John's vigorous leadership got him in trouble with a housewife in the neighborhood. Sometimes chores kept him occupied. The father was a good provider, but the family was not well off and John had to earn his own money. For a year or two he carried papers for the Morning Journal, a job he performed with only average proficiency, and during high school he worked on nearby ranches during the summers. His lifelong interest in the mysteries and beauty of nature began with boyhood experiences with animals, birds, trees, and flowers, which were abundant in and outside Salinas.
The environment into which Steinbeck was born served well to
develop his inclinations and to satisfy his needs. The Salinas Valley of
California provided a physical setting in which majesty and menace
were mixed. Its alternate promises of fertility and threats of drought
worked wonder in a sensitive, plastic nature and stirred an alert
intelligence. He developed a passion for all the sounds, scents and
tastes of things, animate and inanimate. These crowded in upon him
making him conscious, as he once expressed it of "how the afternoon
felt". Spontaneously investigative and responsive from the first, the
young Steinbeck found himself in a family setting that he could enjoy.
Its assets included many books from among which the boy chose what
he needed to serve the purpose of his self education: Malory, Milton,
Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, Dostoevski, and Thucydides. That he
digested instruction well is evident in the enduring influence that many
of these guides had on his own work. The oneness of human experience
was real to Steinbeck in relation to time as well as to space. What he
read seemed to be not about events and passions of far away and long
ago but rather, as he observed "about things that happened to me"

Steinbeck's family neither rich nor poor, made up a comfortable
community. The members of it helped each other when they could but
encouraged any show of initiative and independence. The father always
unobtrusively sympathetic to the younger Steinbeck's desire to become
a writer, once paid, out of a small salary as an official of city
government, a minute allowance, which kept him in the bare necessities of life while he worked at his manuscripts. The mother as a girl had been a school teacher and, though she did not want her son to become a writer and would have preferred to see him established in a profession of knolledged prestige, she set him on the long search for enlightenment through books.

Steinbeck's home-life as has been "definitely bourgeois". He must have been a somewhat solemn child. Judging from the temperament of "the boy Jody" in *The Red Pony (1937)*, who seems to be a partly autobiographical character, Steinbeck had remarked that children are wise rather than gay. There was much to make life interesting for a boy in that region. The readers of *The Red Pony* will recall how impressed. Jody was with the mountains that lifted above him. The Gabilans were "Jolly", but the mountains on the coast side seemed to have a menace.

It is evident from all his writings how the fertile bed of the Valley attracted Steinbeck: it was full of living and growing things, cattle and the fruit and grain and vegetables being raised and produced there. El Camino Real, which had been the king of Spain's highway, twined across the Valley from one crumbling mission to another. Steinbeck as a child often visited monetary, the most romantic of California towns. The Spaniards had named and claimed it just three hundred years before he was born; in the 1700's the principal
California mission, the San Carlos, was built there, and in the following century Monterey was capital of the Bear Flag republic. It is still a picturesque and interesting place. Its most notable feature is the fantastically deformed cypresses that writhe in the wind on the black cliff above the ocean.

Steinbeck became acquainted early in life with the paisanos he was to write of in Tortilla Flat (1935). The greatest single influence on John Steinbeck's life and work was his California origin. He was born and brought up in the extreme south-west coast of the United States. Many of his successful pieces of fiction have their setting in a region, the Pacific Ocean between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Pacific Ocean sprawls to the west and the towering Sierra Nevada mountain keeps sentinel in the east. Steinbeck’s favorite region in this geographical area is the Salinas Valley, christened by him nostalgically as the "long Valley". Its outlet to the Pacific is at Monterey Bay.

Steinbeck loved the people inhabiting this favorite region as much as he was fascinated by it. Like Wordsworth, he loved nature and man, or to be more precise, man in nature. To such a love is incidental the love of right causes especially those concerning the expropriated and indigent sections. Such a love and solicitude for a common man is what informs his most characteristic works. This makes him valid even today. His sympathy for the underdog and his sense of justice and fair play were probably imbibed from his home environment. His father was
the treasurer of Monterey Country and was fairly a well to do person. At home, young Steinbeck enjoyed all the advantages of an enlightened and cultured domestic back ground. His mother, prior to her marriage, was a schoolteacher. This probably gave him the right kind of introduction to books. Indeed, he seems to have read widely; much of his knowledge was gathered that way. During his school holidays, Steinbeck used to work in the farms of the neighborhood. This threw him into the lap of the lush, green valleys and brown-grassed hills of Central California. Salinas, his birthplace, had a mixed and colorful population—a cross-section of the American nation. Among them he chose his friends, who later became his unforgettable characters in fiction.

Steinbeck’s childhood must have been much like that of the boy Jody in *The Red Pony*, whose love for the Gabilan Mountains to the east and fear of the Santa Lucia range toward the ocean Steinbeck acknowledged as a person his childhood experience on the opening page of *East of Eden*. Like Jody who made a death symbol out of the black cypress trees under which the pigs were scalded and a life symbol out of the mossy tub, which caught the spring water, Steinbeck was a sensitive boy. Replying to a publisher’s request for early biographical information, he wrote back that the most important things in his childhood would be of no meaning to others “... the way the sparrows hopped about on the mud street early in the morning when I was little
... the most tremendous morning in the world when my pony had a colt."

This sensitivity to the experiences of childhood is also revealed in some remarks Steinbeck made early in 1936 when he was thinking about *The Red Pony*:

*I want to recreate a child's world, not of fairies and giants but of colors more clear than they are to adults of tastes more sharp and of queer heart breaking feelings that overwhelm children in a moment. [Jody's feelings at the end of "The great Mountains" for example] I want to put down the way 'afternoon felt'- and the feeling about a bird that sang in a tree in the evening."

Another important factor in Steinbeck's early years was his mother's former position as a school teacher. There must have been books around the household to interest a young boy. He must have been a pretty wellread boy when he entered his high school. His being president of his senior class, however, was due more to his position on the track and basketball teams than his scholarship or literary effort for El Gabilan, the school paper. During his high school years he extended his experience of the California countryside and its people by spending many of his days as a hired hand on nearby ranches. In the year's interval between graduation and entering Stanford, he took employment as assistant chemist in a sugar beet factory nearby. In the autumn of 1919 he entered Stanford University at Palo Alto. He made none of the athletic teams while he was there, though at first he tried out "
vaguely" for crew and football. In the spring of 1920 he left Stanford for a while, returning into autumn but disappearing again soon afterwards. He went to work on a ranch at King City. The place where Steinbeck was working and the varied jobs that came his way at that ranch were helping him both to absorb background material and to know at first hand what it was like to be an agricultural laborer. He has always been sympathetic to the common man and his problems, and unlike so many writers he is never bored with simple, illiterate people. When asked, after the publication of *In Dubious Battle* (1936), if he had swung to the left, he answered that he had always essentially been on the left.

Steinbeck returned to Stanford for the academic year 1922-23. He roomed at this time with C.A. Sheffield, who afterwards taught English at Stanford and later became a newspaperman in northern California. He did not stay on regularly at Stanford, but dropped again, worked on other ranches and spent a summer as night chemist at the sugar factory.

Steinbeck left Stanford for good in 1925. He had announced that he wasn't studying for a degree, and had roamed over the curriculum at will, taking whatever subjects he pleased. In the several years he spent at Stanford he earned only about half of the required 180 units. He wrote both poetry and prose for the university magazines, the Spectator and the Lit. It was at this time that he put on paper the first version of what was to become his first published novel, *Cup of Gold*; it was then
a short story called "A lady in Infra Red." He took all the writing
courses in school except one, a course in play-writing for which the
professor considered him unfit. His ambition to be a writer led him to
New York after he left Stanford for the last time. He worked for a
newspaper for a short while after his arrival in New York; he pitched
out this job for reporting the news philosophically and poetically
instead of presenting the blunt facts. He became a hood carrier and in
his capacity helped build the new Madison Square Garden. When the
Garden was finished, he stayed in New York trying to become a
freelance writer. Guy Holt, who was then an editor for Mc Bride and
Company, had encouraged Steinbeck to prepare a book of short stories.
But after Holt had left Mc Bride to join the Day Company the Mc Bride
editor refused to accept the stories despite the brouhaha Steinbeck
raised in the office. Later Steinbeck collapsed on the street and was
taken to a hospital. He decided it was time to return to California. Mc
Bride and Company accepted *Cup of Gold*, which was actually the
fourth novel he had written. It was published in August 1929, and while
it was not a money maker, Steinbeck felt sufficiently encouraged to get
married. His bride was Carol Henning, who like his mother, had come
from San Jose. She ran away with him and they were married in Los
Angeles in 1930.
Steinbeck and his wife went to live in a small house his father
gave him in Pacific Grove. Though it is near the art colony at Carmel-
by the sea and although it lies just below Monterey, Pacific Grove has
none of Carmel’s Bohemianism or of Monterey lurid reputation. He and
his wife had been planning for some time to visit Mexico, and now for
the first time they had enough money to go. In July 1935 he signed a
contract with Covici-Friede for six books. Steinbeck might have driven
harder bargain than he did with Covici-Friede, but he liked the firm
and was satisfied with the terms he received. In the autumn the
Steinbecks at last went to Mexico, in their old car they had intended to
stay through the winter, seeing fiestas at Oaxca, Guadalupe and other
places, but Steinbeck felt he could not work in Mexico. It was so
different like being in an under sea world; the Mexicans seemed to live
at a deep dream-level. The Steinbecks came back to California before
the year was out. Steinbeck felt Mexico was far too bewildering to
write anything about, at least from what he knew of it so far. In the
summer of 1936 he moved away from Pacific Grove, where the coastal
fogs had begun to make his wife miserable with sinus. They left their
little vineclad cottage and moved to the Santa Cruz Mountains near Los
Gatos, where they had a home built along the lines of an old fashioned
California ranch house. There are ‘coons and’ possums and rabbits all
about and at night the coyotes can be heard howling. The house is set
in an oak forest, and has a long veranda over looking the Santa Clara
valley, in the heart of which Steinbeck’s mother and his wife had been born.

During the war year Steinbeck’s personal fortunes were undergoing major changes. The marriage with Carol was breaking up, as close friends, who had witnessed the many quarrels, expected. The divorce in 1942 was followed in 1943 by Steinbeck’s marriage in New Orleans to dancer Gwen Verdon, whom he had met in California. Perhaps because of the war, marital changes and demands of his occupation, Steinbeck moved restlessly about from New York City to Mexico to California and back to New York. Planning to settle in Monterey, he bought an old house in the town but, after living there for a year, decided that the people were not friendly, sold the house and moved permanently to New York. His only children, two boys, were born in 1944 and 1946. Two years after the war, Steinbeck and photographer Robert Capa travelled in Russia. The result of their collaboration, *A Russian Journal* appeared in 1948. During this period Steinbeck also wrote the scripts for the mediocre film versions of *The Red Pony* and for the excellent *Viva Zapata* (1975).

Steinbeck was deeply shaken by two events in the late 1940s. His second marriage with Gwen Verdon was floundering. By 1948 they had agreed upon a divorce. A greater blow awaited him. In 1948, while in the New York apartments, he received word that his friend Ed Ricketts had been grievously injured in a cartrain wreck in Monterey. Deeply
upset, Steinbeck rushed to Monterey. When Ricketts died a few days later, the writer had to be given a sedative and put in bed. He later wrote a tribute to Ricketts that served as the introduction to the 1951 publication of *The Log from The Sea of Cortez*, and, as a final tribute, he created the character of Doc in *Sweet Thursday* (1954).

Attempting to forget the broken marriage and the loss of Ricketts, Steinbeck worked hard on the *Viva Zapata!* (1975) script and on a projected big book about the Salinas Valley. For months, however, recollections and loneliness plagued him. In early 1949, after returning to the Pacific Grove cottage, he met another woman who was to prove essential to his life. Elaine Scott, a talented and understanding person, helped Steinbeck find himself again. After her divorce, they were married in 1950. He returned to the Salinas book with energy and purpose. The book initially planned as a fictional account of his mother’s family, the Hamiltons, included also a New England family, the Trasks. During the years of writing, the Trasks became prominent. The apparent failure to relate the two families and the awkward mixture of allegory and romanticism weakened an otherwise impressive work. *East of Eden* was published in 1952.

Life in New York City proved usually to Steinbeck’s liking through the years. He welcomed the anonymity of the city, its tolerance for all kinds of people and activities, the opportunities in writing, publishing, and the arts. After his marriage to Elaine in 1950, Steinbeck
felt natural and comfortable in routines of city life, which, for the Steinbecks, were generally quiet and moderate. Occasionally they entertained friends, writers, stage-people, journalists, publishers in the brownstone apartment pressure of nature and society have compelled the have-nots to co-operate in order to survive.

As a writer, Steinbeck always felt the tensions and anxieties of his age. He says that “Americans, very many of them, are obsessed with tensions. Nerves are drawn tense and twanging. Emotions boil up and spill over into violence largely in meaningless or unnatural directions. In the cities people scream with rage at one another, taking out their unease on the first observable target. The huge reservoir of the anger of frustration is full to bursting --- of love, only the word, bent and bastardized remains.”

Steinbeck’s opinions were founded upon what he saw in contemporary American scene; modern degeneration and spiritual chaos. He felt strongly that in spite of material prosperity and plenty, the people were morally and spiritually poorer than before because, “We have the things and we have not had time to develop a way of thinking about them.”

To Steinbeck, California is important not only because its soil is rich but also because it has produced men of importance in the fields of science and art. John Gunther records; “But consider California; California swarms with poets, artists, men of science. There is no
opulence in America to surpass it, even in New England. Think of the procession that begins with Bret Harte and Ambros Bierec and continues today with Robinson Jeffers and John Steinbeck."

The Salinas Valley, an integral part of California, gave all that the boy Steinbeck required to satisfy his curiosity and his sense of observation. On holidays, he worked on farms in the neighborhood, which helped him to develop intimate knowledge and love of the lush green Valleys and brown-grassed hills of central California. When he was in his late forties, he said,

"I remember my childhood names for grass and secret flowers". Steinbeck did not have to go outside his long Valley for evidences of the characteristic sickness of modern society. He says,

The merciless 19th century was like a hostile expedition for loot that seemed limitless .... There has always been more than enough desert in America; the new settlers, like over-indulged children, created even more. 

Steinbeck's intellectual interests were encouraged by the well education of his parents. He writes,

Some literature was in the air around me. The Bible I absorbed through my skin. My uncles exuded Shakespeare, and Pilgrim's Progress was mixed with my mother's milk.

In a letter to Ben Abramson, John Steinbeck has commented on his early readings. He writes that certain books were "realer than experience – Crime and Punishment was like that and Madame Bovary
and parts of *Paradise Lost* and things of *George Eliot* and *The Return of the Native*. I read all these when I was very young and I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me.”  

Another very important reading he did during his childhood was Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*. He wrote to C.V. Wicker,

> The first book that was my own was very own was the Caxton *Morte d’Arthur*. I got it when I was nine years old. Over the years I have been more affected by it than by anything else except possibly the King- James Version. Later it caused a fairly intensive study of Anglo-Saxon, old and middle English all of which I suspect have had a profound effect on my prose.

Steinbeck’s literary career spanned four decades. His works including novels, short stories, plays, film scripts and a lot of non-fiction. He was a freelance journalist too. He wrote about poverty, hunger, the sheer struggle for existence, the social outcasts, the misfits of life and the mentally handicapped. He wrote of the underdog; the skilled worker, the exploiter and the exploited; he wrote about the dreams and frustrations of the humble; and above all he wrote of the loneliness of man in society. This wide world of Steinbeck is as full of tragedy and laughter as the world of Dickens. Through all these writings over the years if there was one unifying and common factor it was his Compassion for man. And seeds of compassion were sown in his boyhood and early youth in rural California. In 1924 he contributed two stories to the Stanford Spectator—“Finger of Cloud” and “Adventures in
Arcademy.” By 1925, he had read widely—Milton, Browning, Thackeray, George Eliot, D.H.Lawrence, Jeffers, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Sherwood Anderson etc. During these intervals when he was not in attendance at Stanford, he worked at variety of jobs. He worked on various ranches and worked with labourers who were building the first road below Big Street. At this period he came to believe that the greed of the capitalists and the stupidity of the workers have made it impossible to establish socialism. He developed feelings of revolt against conventional religion. John Bennett in “The Wrath of John Steinbeck or St. John goes to Church” has observed that on Sunday a fellow worker of John Steinbeck took him to Church. Steinbeck broke out from the Congregation saying, “Feed the body and the soul will take care of itself... I don’t think much of preaching... go on... you’re getting paid for it...”

He underwent a wide range of experience during his life time. His was a childhood soaked in impressions of fertile earth, the mountains and fishing ports of California, sporadic study at Stanford University, the half enchanted work as a newspaper reporter as also odd jobs like, housepainter, fruit picker, surveyer, caretaker, filled the early decades of the man who at his death was a thrice married father of two children.

Despite numerous odds, Steinbeck continued to tread upon hazardous path of becoming a writer of repute. In 1925, he went to New York hoping to make him living as a writer. He had only
three dollars in his pocket when he reached there. His brother in law found a job for him. He had to push wheel barrows of concrete for the construction of Madison Square Garden. Later he got the job of a reporter for the New York American but was discharged after some time. He returned to California working as a deck-hand. In 1926, his three poems were published in Stanford literature. These are humorous poems as their titles also indicate. If Eddle Guese had Written the Book of Job; Happy Birthday, If John A Weaver Had Written Keats’s Sonnet in the American Language On Looking at a New Book by Harold Bell Wright, Atropos; Study of a Very Feminine Obituary Editor. In California he took a job as caretaker of an estate on Lake Tahoe but was soon dismissed when a huge tree fell crashing through a roof. He started working in a nearby fish hatchery. It was at this time he completed his first published novel *Cup of Gold*. It appeared in 1929, the year of the stock market collapse and the beginning of the great Depression. In this novel he created Henry Morgan, a man destined to greatness, who alienates himself from mankind because of his great ambition but by the end of the novel he loses control of the quest and realizes that the products of his money and power are transient.

His second book, *The Pastures of Heaven*, came out in the autumn of 1932, and has a curious history. It had originally been
accepted by the firm of Brewer, Warren and Putnam. This company went out of business at the moment of publishing the book. But it had aroused the enthusiasm of a member of the firm, Robert O, Ballou, who then brought the novel out on his own. There is a bibliographical confusion about the first edition of *The Pastures of Heaven*, which bears several imprints. Of the first 2500 sheets, 1650 were published with the Brewer, Warren and Putnam title-page and binding. This is, of course, the legitimate first issue. Ballou took over the remaining 850 sets of unbound sheets, and this is where the confusion begins. Authorities differ as to whether these sheets were used for these more issues, making four altogether, or merely two more, making there in all.

Ben Abramson, one Steinbeck authority, counts as second issue whatever copies appeared with Brewer, Warren and Putnam on the spine and a Robert O Ballou title-page pasted in on the stub of the original. Another authority, the assiduous Steinbeck collector Lawrence Clark Powell (whose check lists have appeared in the Publishers’ Weekly, the Book Collector’s Packet and the Colophon), has never seen one of these copies of mixed insignia and calls them “merely freaks or strays, not entitled to ranking as separate issues.”

Powell holds that the second issue is the one with the Ballou binding and tipped-in title page, which Abramson calls the third issue. Ballou didn’t have all the 850 sets of sheets rebound, so when Covici-Friede took over Steinbeck’s work in 1935, they used the balance of
them, providing their own binding and tipping in their own title page. This may serve as either the third or fourth issue, as you prefer. One thing is certain: the man in all the world who cares least about the question is John Steinbeck. *The Pastures of Heaven* had been published in London in 1933 by Philip Allan and Company, Ltd. It was still not a money-maker, though it received friendly notices in the press. This didn’t increase Steinbeck’s respect for the British, but it depended his contempt of American reviewers.

His other novel *To a God Unknown* (1933) was labelled “mystical” by some reviewers. But it describes the psychological journey by which the protagonist comes to realize his oneness with the cosmos. *Tortilla Flat*, published in 1935, established him as a writer. The archetypal narrative that he chose for this novel, furnished him with wider opportunities to explain the inexplicable. In this world of sterile ideas and destructive life-styles where the forces of modern life depersonalize human emotions and direct ambitions towards power and profit, he suggested a rechannellizing of energies as essential to attain psychological equilibirium. His novel shocked some Californians and made others believe that they had a valuable possession in such picturesque “natives.” The book was awarded the annual Gold Medal of the Common Wealth Club of California. *Tortilla Flat* was bringing enough money to enable Steinbeck to paint his house and refinish the walls and ceilings. Ironically, it was the first Steinbeck’s book to make
money. It appeared on best-seller lists for several months, received the California Common Wealth Club's annual gold medal for the best novel by a Californian, was produced as a stage play (unsuccessfully, however), and made into a motion picture. Also it was banned in Ireland and attacked by the Monterey Chamber of Commerce, who, fearing for its tourist trade announced the book was a lie. Its success surprised Steinbeck "I do not see" he wrote to his agents "what even Hollywood can make Tortilla Flat with its episodic treatment."16

The money from Tortilla Flat made possible at last Steinbeck's trip to Mexico and urged by the "Considerable nuisance" of publicity, he left for Mexico that autumn in a battered second-hand car. He was back before the year's end, and when asked about his trip he replied, "Mexico fades very quickly. I can't remember it very well. I think possibly the people there live on a mental level about equal in depth to our dream level. The contacts I made there are all dreamlike"17

Although In Dubious Battle was Published in January of 1936, just before the outbreak of a lettuce strike in Salinas, Steinbeck had actually completed that novel a year earlier, three months before the publication of Tortilla Flat in May of 1935. This delay in publication, like that of the previous novel, was caused by his publisher's anxiety about the salability of the book. None of the strike novels of the last two or three years had succeeded, and in addition there was some concern about the language of the book, which Steinbeck refused to
change "A working man bereft of his profanity is a silent man," he wrote:

I have used only those expressions that are commonly used. I hope it won't be necessary to remove them. To try to reproduce the speech of these people and to clean it up is to make it sound stiff, unnatural and emasculated. I think it is vulgar only in the Latin sense.18

*In Dubious Battle* was called a "strike-novel" and a "proletarian treatise", but Steinbeck's purpose in this book was more scientific than moral, and more psychological than sociological. The book marks an important development in his consciousness because it is a non-teleological work and an objective psychological portrait of the workers. His short story *St. Katy the Virgin*, appeared in the same year. A series of eight articles *The Harvest Gypsies* appeared in San Francisco News which were later printed in pamphlet from *Their Blood is Strong* in 1938. These articles give a picture of the laborers and migrants during the Depression.

*Of Mice and Men* (1937) raises Steinbeck to national prominence. It was taken up by Book of the Month Club and its play version won New York Drama Critic Circle Award for the best play of 1937. In this novel also the tone is objective but steinbeck has drawn his characters with love and sympathy and has shown an understanding of their dreams and their loneliness. Later in the year, two stories — The Promise and the Ears of Johny Bear were published in Esquire and The
Chrysanthemums appeared in Harpers. *The Long Valley*, a collection of short stories, was published in 1938. Many of the stories are connected technically and thematically with his novels. The most common theme throughout the collection is the working of man's mind and consciousness. *The Red Pony* is out of place in this connection because it is not a series of short stories. It was published in three parts and *The Leader of the People* was added later to it in 1945. In *The Red Pony* (1939), Steinbeck has emphasized a young boy's initiation into a world of natural beauty and of natural violence and there is a special emphasis on the realistic depiction of ranch life as a microcosm.

His journey in 1937 from Oklahoma with the migrants resulted in great desperation. His letters to Elizabeth Otis in February and March of 1938, reveal his growing awareness of the plight of the dispossessed: "Four thousand families drowned out of their tents are really starving to death ... The death of the children by starvation in our valleys is simply staggering ... If I can sell the articles, I'll use the proceeds for serum and such..."19 And again; "The floods have aggravated the starvation and sickness. I went down for Life ... They paid my expenses and will put up money for the help of some of these people ... The suffering too great for me to cash in on it ... It is the most heart-breaking thing in the world."20 This explains the origin of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Perhaps this is one of those rare books of which have created great national controversy. The book received the Pultizer
Prize, the first annual fiction award of Social Work Today, and the American Book-seller's Association Award.

_The Grapes of Wrath_ was followed by a period of travel, of film making and of journalism. In 1941, he produced _Sea of Cortez_ which records a six-week expedition in the Gulf of California with his friend Ed Ricketts. They were motivated by curiosity and thirst for experience; so the boundaries of the book are wide enough to encompass all their observations, thoughts and feelings. After his return from the Gulf of California, he went to Mexico to study the conditions which he recorded in _The Forgotten Village_ (1941). After 1939 he was seldom at home and made trips to foreign lands—Italy, Greece, France, Russia, Scandinacia, England and North Ireland. He had expressed his deep concerned about war in _Sea of Cortez_ end his next two works _Bombs Away_ (1942) and _The Moon is Down_ (1942) are also concerned with war. In 1943, Steinbeck went to Europe as a war correspondent for the New York Herold Tribune. In 1943, he came back home and in 1945 _Cannery Row_ was published. Despite its humour, it is a condemnation of the civilization that creates wars. Beneath the light hearted attack, there is a burning intictment of the sterile ideas of the civilized society. His next two novels _The Pearl_ and _The Wayward Bus_ appeared in 1947. _The Pearl_ is based on a folktale that he had already related in _Sea of Cortez_. It is a complex morality; hypocrisy and deceitful business practices; sexual perversity and listlessness, self-
doubt and loftness. *The Wayward Bus* (1947) was selected as The Book of the Month Club book. He published the record of his trip to Russia, in his work *A Russian Journal* (1948).

In 1950 *Burning Bright* appeared. It was Steinbeck's third attempt in the play novelette form, and from late in 1949 until its completion in the summer of 1950. The book underwent several thorough revisions and changes of title. It was variously called "In the Forests of the Night," "Tiger, Tiger" and finally *Burning Bright*. This title was decided upon after Steinbeck had read the proof sheets, which bear the title "In the Forests of the Nights." The fact that all of these titles are from Blake's poem testifies to the affinity Steinbeck must have felt between that poem and his play-novelette.

Unlike his previous experiment in this form, *Burning Bright* was put on Broadway before being published in novelette form, one month later. Also unlike his previous two experiments, *Burning Bright* was a miserable failure, running less than two weeks. Critics seemed to view with one another in heaping abuse upon the play. But although at first Steinbeck was puzzled by the failure of *Burning Bright*, he came to see the book's deficiencies, and it was not included in *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck* (1953). Four years after the publication of the book he admitted in a private conversation that the play was a failure in writing, that it was too abstract, that it preached too much, and that the audience was always a step ahead of it. He worked on the story and script of
Viva Zapata. In 1951, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* was published containing introduction, and narrative from *Sea of Cortez* and a very moving biography of Ed Rocketts. In 1950 Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* was published. This book, he expected to be his master-piece. He was very enthusiastic about the novel and stated that he had put in it all the things he wanted to write all his life. “It is what I have been practicing to write all my life. Everything has been training.” 21 This book brought all his ideas together – realism, non-teleological thinking, scientific detachment, personal philosophy, moral concern, cosmic consciousness. *Sweet Thursday* (1954) has been dismissed by many critics as inferior, sentimental and hence a failure. But if the book’s view without any previous prejudices, one finds that it is not a mere ‘fanciful entertainment’ and it has a definite moral purpose behind it.

The publication of his next book *A Fabrocation; The Short Reign of Pippin* 1V (1957) surprised many readers but it is a further proof of his versatility. The same year he made a trip to Europe with his wife and his sister. This marks the beginning of seriuous research into Malory and the Morte D’ Arthur. In 1960 he made a three-month trip round U.S.A. His last novel *The Winter of Our Discontent* appeared in 1961. In his earlier writings, the signs of evil are apparent in different groups of people such as businessmen, ranch-owners etc. or in individuals such as Cathy. But in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, evil dominates all branches of society. It was selected by Book of the Month
Club. Steinbeck traveled for ten months in Europe and in 1962, his *Travels With Charley* was published. He received Nobel Prize for Literature in December, 1962. In 1966, *American and Americans* was published. This book reveals his passionate love of America and Americans. He has described America as he sees it – its natural wealth, its short comings, the paradoxes of its history and promise of his future. He had the first heart attack in 1961. He had to undergo a back operation in 1967. He had died of heart attack in New York City on December 20, 1968.

Throughout his literary career, Steinbeck continually attempted to reconcile several incompatible views of mankind. It is due to his wealth of themes, forms and techniques that a categorization of his works is a very difficult task. He has successfully merged scientific ideas, social realities, economic thoughts, bioligocal 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 his problems while, in his early works, there is scientific objectivism and subjective social commentary. His Nobel Prize Acceptances Speech very clearly defines the role of a writer;
The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement.

"Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit-for gallantry in defeat-for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation.

"I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature."

Steinbeck wrote with his 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 and 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 executives 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 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 toward 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 Lopes sisters are condemned for their 'innocent' way of prostitution.

Steinbeck's concern with morality is visible in all his works from Henry Morgan's a morality to Ethan Hawley's conversion to conformity. His criticism of organized religion and conventional morality abounds in such work as *Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, The Pearl* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Although he does not criticize 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 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 can not claim to have a true vocation.”

One must, I believe, recognize certain facts about Steinbeck’s writing in order to attain a true perspective, Christian or otherwise, on it. First, from his early stories and novels set in the Salinas Valley of his birth (1902) and first forty years, Steinbeck was a man with message. No doubt because of the easily recognized, often deceptively easy- to define “themes” of his works, he has been a favourite with teachers and critics; despise their obvious disagreements, all are in accord that each Steinbeck novel is trying constantly to prove a point. Second, the vehicle for his didacticism is often allegory, sometimes recognizable, occasionally private and veiled, not unlike that of
Melville or Hawthorne. Even his most "realistic" fiction is heavily saturated with allusion — mythological, archetypal, historical and biblical. To deny this fact, as many have, is to underrate the artistic achievement of this Nobel prizewinning author. Finally, one should realize that from his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), to his last work of fiction, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), Steinbeck was predominantly even obsessively-concerned with religion and the religious experience in our time. Attesting to this fact are the very titles of his major stories and novels, among them *To a God Unknown* (1932), *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), "St. Katy the Virgin" (1936), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), *East of Eden* (1952). Others such as *The Pearl* (1947), *Sea of Cortez* (1941), *Burning Bright* (1950), and *The Wayward Bus* (1947) deal directly with major religious themes; and the plethora of characters, places, comments and events that consider or derive from religious subjects demonstrates his continuing concern with the doctrines and the practices of twentieth-century Christianity.

Steinbeck preferred to speak through his works. Avoiding publicity whenever possible, he wrote little about his extended trip to Vietnam, where he observed the war as he did World War II (the result then was *Bombs Away* in 1942). From 1961 until his death on December 20, 1968, writing *Travels with Charley* (1962), a non-fiction account of a cross country trip, and *America and Americans* (1966), a panoramic illustrated depiction (later televised) of contemporary life, replaced his
output of a novel nearly every year. For Steinbeck's religions concern is not with one belief, one doctrine, one faith. Christianity and its traditions form a major base for his fiction, but what we shall call his dual method of parable and syncretic allegory enables him to universalize his major themes in a manner for which he is not usually given enough credit.

Steinbeck's basic attitude towards the human race, and man's often futile attempts to understand and accept the continuing existence of both good and evil are told and retold, in short story, drama and novel. And because Steinbeck is so constantly aware of the forms that the awareness of good and evil takes, the reader must constantly distinguish between subject and method, for it is only with full awareness of Steinbeck's dual role as religious theorist and artist that one can fully comprehend a given work. He once said,

What some people find in religion, a writer may find in his craft ... absorption of the small and frightened and lonely into the whole and complete, a kind of breaking through to glory.\(^{24}\)

The above survey of Steinbeck's fictional and non-fictional writings reveal that the most significant ideas he dwelt upon are belief in the primary and inalienable rights of man, in the importance of the individual and in human solidarity and brotherhood, defiance of tradition and disregard for all external authority, distrust of organised religion and priesthood, contempt for greed and lust for possession,
preference for a simple unaffected way of life based on rural, agrarian
culture having self-reliance and small proprietorship. Large and varied
segments of American life, which have remained neglected for long, get
a sharp focus in his fiction. Starting with his first novel *Cup of Gold*
(1929) and continuing through his last work, *The Winter of Our
Discontent* (1961), Steinbeck has actually presented man engaged in the
process of living, making efforts to rise above an individuality which stops him from becoming a group animal and trying, as a group, to
maintain his individuality. He appears to believe that the story of man-
kind is an unbending cycle of frustration and remorse. People never
change until they face extinction but rather they create problems for
those who try to better the human condition.

Steinbeck is actually a humanist who has brought out the
simmering discontent of the day in his works. From dark days of
Depression (1929-33) till the very end of his life, he thought about
human problems and crisis-ridden civilization and raised his voice
against what he considered wrong, unnatural, arbitrary, oppressive and
immoral. Though he was mistaken for a communist and branded as a
bitter critic of the Establishment, he actually belonged to the group of
the "loyal opposition."

Steinbeck is no doubt an idealist and optimist. He is at the same
time a pragmatist too. Influenced by mystical transcendentalism of
Emerson (1803-1882) and the pragmatic instrumentalism of William
James (1882-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952), he sets before us very simple ideals which are the need of the hour. James Gray has thus remarked on his role as a critic of society:

...no other writer of our time has found so many ways of reminding us that man must be the beneficiary of his institutions, not their victim. His best work dramatises the plight of man how tragically, how humorously with the aid of challenge, irony, homely eloquence and subtle insight-as he indomitably struggles to make his environment a protective garment, not a hair-cloth shirt.25

All the above expressed views and quite a few more have been quite clearly enunciated in his Non Fictional works. Among his non fictional works Sea of Cortez (1951) is actually "a statement of Steinbeck's point of view, the interpretation of man and society which he expressed in his novels of the Thirties and Forties."26 Steinbeck’s organismic theory of groups which owed more to Biology than to political Theory has been discussed in detail. W.C. Allee’s Animal Aggregations (1931) played a significant role in shaping this theory. To Steinbeck a human group is a single organism. It is the colonial animal like pelagic tunicate. While speaking of the schools, Steinbeck extends the conception from organized groups to whole species, to ecological communities to all life. And hence the state or national society as a single animal, is but an organ of a larger single animal, the human species, and that in turn is an organ of the single animal which is the biosphere. Actually the whole world is a single organism.
Steinbeck another wellknown shaping speculation which is discussed in detail in this book is his Non-teleological or “is” thinking. This philosophical speculation serves to be the foundation of his social Darwinism, organismic theory, and chain of Being. This type of thinking seems to be the mixture of philosophical relativism, the rigorous refusal of the scientist to be dogmatic about hypotheses, and a sort of moral fatalism. To quote:

Non-teleological ideas derive through “is” thinking, associated with natural selections as Darwin seems to have understood it. They imply depth, fundamentalism, and clarity-seeing beyond traditional or personal projection. They consider events as out growths and expressions rather than as results; conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all important prerequisite. Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually “is” — attempting atmost to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how instead of why.27

Like Sea of Cortez, Travels with Charley in Search of America (1962) is Steinbeck’s introspective study of men and materials for his recent fiction. In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck’s universe was actually the tide pool. In Travels with Charley, Steinbeck looks for the American dreams, virtues and the glory of the pioneers among the moderns. This travelogue reflects his concerns for the morals, the disease of “an ethics,” and a certain element of hate, in the lives of his country men. In his another book, America and Americans (1966) Steinbeck,
nodbout, expresses these and similar anxieties about his country and the people. Steinbeck expresses his anguish over the falling standards of living amidst peace and prosperity. The public philosophy of "the fast buck" is dwelt upon in detail here. The curse of racial hatred also finds detailed discussion in this and other writings.

The present study in the following five chapters intends to examine the non-fictional writings of John Steinbeck. During the four decades of his literary career, Steinbeck has constantly reacted to the social attitudes and changing values without caring for his personal gains or losses. His writings steam with anger at injustice, with hatred for self-pity, with bitter attacks and scorn for the cunning and self-righteousness and also the system that encourages exploitation, greed and brutality. An effort will be made in the succeeding study to bring to light his concept of man, his philosophical ideals such as Non-teleological or "Is" thinking and the Theory of group organism. His views about his great country's Democracy, Dream and Westward movement will also be examined. The problem of racial discrimination between the Blacks and the Whites will also form the part of study. As a writer always trying to reach perfection, Steinbeck constantly experimented certain views on the art of fiction which will also be incorporated in this study. Since Steinbeck has used myths and legends as artistic devices to enrich meaning, to universalize themes of topical interest, to draw parallels and to establish contrasts for ironic exposure
of pretentions and moral degradations, an attempt will also be made to
evaluate them on the basis of clues provided in his prefaces, forewords
and prologues and also letters written to his friends, agents and
publishers. Critical opinions already available will also be thoroughly
probed and used to substantiate insights and findings.
REFERENCES:


4- Ibid.


6- Ibid., p. 174.


9- *America and Americans*, p. 146.


12- Ibid., p.23.

13- Ibid., p.25.


17- Ibid.

18- Ibid.,p.10.


21- Ibid., p.310.


23- Ibid.


27- Ibid., p.33.