Chapter III
Study of the Novels
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*Cup of Gold* (1929)
*To a God Unknown* (1933)
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*Tortilla Flat* (1935)
*In Dubious Battle* (1936)
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CUP OF GOLD (1929)

In this chapter, some of the major works of John Steinbeck which are relevant to the theme of American Depression have been taken up for discussion.

*Cup of Gold* was adopted from a short story entitled "*A Lady In Infra Red*"¹ which was written several times before. The story begins in Wales when Dafyd returned after spending years in the Indies.

After his return he inspired a Welshboy, Henry Morgan to go to the Caribbean. When Henry spoke to his father that he must leave home, the father wanted that he should first discuss with Merlin, who is said to be a
sooth sayer or forecaster of Greek oracle myth. Henry approached Merlin and asked for advice. Merlin replied:

You are a little boy. You want the moon to drink from as a golden cup; and so, it is very likely that you will become a great man – if only you remain a little child. All the world's great have been little boys who wanted the moon, running and climbing, they sometimes caught a firefly.  

On his way back, Henry saw a yellow-haired girl called Elizabeth at the window. And that night he left for Cardiff. In Cardiff a sailor bound for Barbados took Henry in his ship to work in the galley to help for his passage. As the story moves Henry was sold as an apprentice slave to James Flower an inefficient but a kind old planter. After two years Henry became the overseer, and in the long run became the master of the plantation. Henry at the age of 18, by that time a strong and well-built boy, bought a ship, careened it, and when he had scraped and painted her, christened it 'Elizabeth' and went to sea. By that time freed himself from the services of James Flower. He went on buccaneering and sailed to Port Royal where his uncle was the Lt. Governor.  

With time Henry became a full-fledged buccaneer and went on fighting, plundering and burning. He was successful at that moment, but he was lonely at his glory despised by the men who behaved servilely or fond of him.
On hearing the news of Henry’s success in the sea, one day his father Robert visited Merlin and said:

It is said that he (Henry) rules a race of pirates; that he has captured towns and pillaged cities. The English are elated, and called him a hero and a patriotic man—and so do I, sometimes.¹

His feeling towards his son represents the general feeling of the English. But Merlin’s reply was rather sarcastic:

So’, Merlin mused, he has come to be the great man he thought he wanted to be. If this is true, then he is not a man. He is still a little boy and wants the moon.⁵

While Morgan was at the peak of his buccaneering career, he heard some rumour which said:

There is a woman in Panama and she is lovely as the sun. They called her the Red Saint in Panama. All men kneel to her.⁶

The rumour of her beauty was spread among the young sea men, they spoke softly of her in the streets of Goaves. No one had seen her but she became the quest of everyman’s heart. And Henry Morgan was no exception. He asked the messenger from Don Juan, the Governor of Panama:

Have you seen the woman whom they call the Red Saint in Panama?⁷
The messenger's simple reply was:

I have not seen, no; but I have heard of her ... It is said that she is lovely as the sun.  

The messenger's reply started forming small ripples of desire in Henry's mind to see the Red Saint.

In their next meeting Henry asked the same messenger:

Did you learn more of La Santa Raja.  

On this, the messenger from the Governor of Panama replied:

Only what they tell in the streets. Sir, I inquired closely for your benefit. I was told that in the streets she wears a thick veil that none may see her face. Some think she does this so that the poor men who meet her will not kill themselves for love.  

On hearing the reply of the messengers, Henry Morgan mad up his mind and he said:

Only repeat that I will go to the Cup of Gold within the year.
Morgan really prepared for the invasion. In the words of the author:

When the time came for departure, captain Morgan had thirty-seven ships under his hands, and two thousand fighting men in addition to the mariners and boys.\(^\text{12}\)

In the meantime, Morgan began to ponder why he wished to conquer the city. Incidentally one of his followers namely Coeur de Gris told him that he wanted La Santa Rosa, and not Panama. In this, Morgan agreed and said:

You cannot understand my yearning. It is as though I strove for some undreamed peace. This woman is the harbour of all my questing. I do not think of her as a female thing with arms and breasts, but as a moment of peace after turmoil, a perfume after rancid filth.\(^\text{13}\)

The inhabitants of Panama heard about the threatened invasion of Morgan. A strong and fierce, battalion of loot-hungry sea pirates was waiting for his order to attack Panama. At last he declared:

Your orders are to fire at their centre, all of you; and when that centre is weakened, then charge and split them.\(^\text{14}\)

After leading his forces for nine days, Morgan captured Panama with a brutal strike. Morgan and his men looted and burnt the city mercilessly.
As Morgan and his men looted and burnt the city he was curious and worried for the Red Saint. The lady came and told him that her name was Ysobel. Seeing her appearance he was taken aback as she reminded him of the beautiful Elizabeth of his youthful days in Wales.

Further, on seeing Ysobel he was drawn and attracted towards her in such a manner that he decided to marry her. This decision was not accepted and this issue was repelled by her very strongly. The woman informed him that she was happily married already but Morgan made his advances, which led her to stab him with a pin as a defence. In the midst of all these, a messenger arrived with the ransom from Ysobel’s husband for her return. Now Henry, ‘sick with a disease called mediocrity’ desired nothing, and said:

I do not want anything anymore. I have no lusts, and my desires are dry and rattling. I have only a vague wish for peace and the time to ponder imponderable matters.15

He received the ransom, collected all the treasures in one ship and leaving all his men on the beach drunk, he sailed alone with the riches. On his arrival at Port Royal, he was given a heroic welcome and he was taken to Governor Moddy Ford. The Governor informed Morgan that his cousin, Elizabeth, daughter of Hanry’s uncle, late Sir Edward Morgan, former Governor of Port Royal, was living with the Fords. Then Morgan met Elizabeth through Lady Moddy Ford, Elizabeth trapped him into marriage. After the marriage both, the Governor and Henry set a sail to England. In
England Henry was knighted by King Charles, the second, and appointed him Lt. Governor of Jamaica with orders to stop all piracy or buccaneering. As time moved on Henry became a wicked victim of a dangerous disease and on his death-bed he was confronted with the thoughts of all his sins committed. But as fate destined, he died with the memory of the little yellow-haired Elizabeth from Cambria.

*Cup of Gold* is a historical romance. It is the story of the quest for the Grail in the seventeenth century context. It had to its sub-title—'A life of Sir Henry Morgan, Buccaneer, with Occasional Reference to History'. Steinbeck at one time felt that the novel is the product of a restless young man in search of a career and a way of life. He wished the book was not published.

When one reads the novel for the first time, the impression created is that of the young man's romantic longings filled with violence, melodrama and heroic. This is shown in Henry Morgan's progress from Wales to a buccaneering empire with grand and amorous adventures. Morgan's capturing of Panama reached its climax with the *Cup of Gold* and legendary beauty known as the 'Red Saint'. There are simple romantic posturing and paraphernalia of presenting a serious theme. Towards the end of the novel these posturing and paraphernalia become the object of criticism. The point at issue is that the novel is not an eulogy of romantic adventure but a serious scrutiny of the motive, the methods and consequences of great ambitions.
In the beginning the Welsh boy Henry refused to be content with the ordinary life in his native village. He set out on a lonely road to a great dream. Fortunately or unfortunately one can find some affinity between the young Steinbeck and his California valley with the young Morgan in his native Welsh valley. Sometimes under compulsion, driving Morgan into the romantic world seems to be somewhat vague. Outwardly it seems to have grown out of his desires, fault, fame, fortune and the love of a woman. The prophesy which Henry Morgan heard from the old and wise Merlin makes it clear the more mature and almost make-believe attitude of the author towards his hero’s place. A large number of scholars have found some connection between this quest and the quest for the Holy Grail. In 1920 T.S. Eliot referred to Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*, tracing the legend of the Grail and also to Frazer’s *Golden Bough* dealing with the rituals of the dying fertility gods of the ancient land in the near East. These books had a great impact on Steinbeck both directly or indirectly. Merlin reminded the little boy Henry that he had descended from the Trojans.

In this way, Steinbeck’s *Cup of Gold* has been examined by various scholars with reference to the myth of the dying and rising gods. In the *Cup of Gold* the romantic hero said to Merlin:

There is so much bother about me. I can not seem to talk of this thing, Merlin. I will come back. Surely I will when this burning for new things is quenched. But don’t you see that I must go, for it seems that I am cut in half and only one part of me is here. The other piece is over the sea, calling and calling me to come and be
whole. I love Cambria, and I will come back when I am whole again.\textsuperscript{16}

However, even after capturing Panama ‘the cup of gold’ became a symbol of ‘torture’. One of the prisoners said:

‘You were tortured in men’s minds. They feasted on your heart and soul to hell’.\textsuperscript{17}

Here Morgan became a villain rather than a hero. Morgan found a golden cup amidst the heap of loot taken at Panama but the golden cup was found to be a mere bubble or a showy trinket. Steinbeck wrote:

It was a lovely, slender chalice with long curved handles and a rim of silver. Around its outer edge four grotesque lambs chased each other, and inside, on the bottom, a naked girl lifted her arms in sensual ecstasy.\textsuperscript{18}

Morgan and his buccaneers were regarded as a knight and his companions going in search of the Holy Grail as mentioned in the ‘Knights of the Round Table’. In this context the prophesy of Merlin is to be remembered. He prophesized that Henry will always be a child if wanted to take the moon and he would be alone in his greatness. Loneliness was one of the reasons that drew Henry from his narrow valley in Wales. The valley was a limited place, with a warm and friendly home. His ambition and romantic adventures cut him off from his family members and friends. He even treated his friends and enemies ruthlessly to achieve his goal. The
most interesting aspect of the novel is the presentation of gradual disillusionment in the Cup of Gold or the man who turned out to be a mere ‘firefly’. Again the fabled idea of beauty, which was the object of his quest turned out to be ‘Ysobel of Panama’ a cynical and sensual woman of flesh and blood. The shrinking and dwindling into mundane reality of Morgan’s tinsel world of heroism and adventure comes to its climax in the surprising last scene, when the reformed buccaneer, now Lt. Governor of Jamaica, lies, the loneliest of men, on his death bed. His past deeds rise around him, images of faceless, misshapen children crying “Why did you do me”? And ‘Why did you think me’? The ego of Morgan gradually narrows down as his consciousness fades until the world he had created vanishes together. He imagined himself worthless. In his own words:

‘They are moving,’ he thought. ‘I am not moving. I am fixed. I am the centre of all things and cannot move. I am as heavy as the universe. Perhaps I am the Universe.’

With these words his romantic world collapses. One can feel that romance is the perception of events through myths and legends. But one’s perception becomes entangled with the perennial theme of the vanity of human achievement. This is what really happens in Steinbeck’s *Cup of Gold*. Merlin’s verdict that he would become a great man if only he remained a child, can be interpreted as the word ‘Child’ does not refer to the innocence of childhood but to its follies. When the child becomes a man then the structures of romance collapse. *Cup of Gold* is a novel which explores the above idea. The novel was neither realistic nor it had details of historical events. Instead, Steinbeck found the land and the world that he
needed for the writing of the novel, which was his own Californian Valley. Critics feel that Cup of Gold, which is the first novel of Steinbeck, is not a great work.

Of course it tells a good story and contains some passages of good writing. In the process of writing, the novelist could have learnt a great deal about his art and craft of writing. One finds many a favorite theme and characteristic type appeared in this novel for the first time. In fact, Steinbeck had not yet met the biologist Ed. Ricketts. But the novel shows his interest in biology. Various similes as in ‘the farm houses huddled like feeding bugs’, showing his accurate observation on living creatures. Group organism of later novels in the brotherhood of the buccaneers has been shown in this novel.

Cup of Gold has a ‘rich diction and imagery’. The novel shows Steinbeck’s gift for listening and reconstructing what he heard with natural rhythm and nuances. His sensibility to language in the first novel and his extensive use of myth and legend, indicate the author’s future course of works. His prose is tailored so that it became an integral part of the unique quality of each word. Here is the evidence of a young Steinbeck’s instrument shaped according to the writer’s purpose. Apart from the aspect of languages, the book shows the first sign of human motives, desires and actions in terms of biology. For example the inhabitants of Panama will make the readers remember the biological process. Similarly, in the beginning of his later novel, In Dubious Battle Steinbeck’s group-
theory became essential. In his novel *Cup of Gold* Steinbeck points out how an officer observes his ‘horsemen’.

He wrote:

> as though they were the multi members of one great body governed by his brain.  

Peter Lisca explores two themes which are found basically in Steinbeck’s later novels. One is the contrast between dream and reality, the other is the contrast between escape and commitment to relationship between the individual and society. The theme of *Cup of Gold* also lies in the conflict between Henry Morgan’s freedom to pursue his dream and the constraints society places on him and his dreams. Henry’s dream first appears to him as confused. His primitive urge will eventually take him away from his family and homeland. From the very start, the dream puts Henry, apart from men and society. He goes for the *Cup of Gold* and ‘the Red Saint’.

When Merlin is informed of Henry’s coup of Panama and the Cup of Gold, he expresses:

> ‘So’, Merlin mused, ‘he has come to be the great man he thought he wanted to be. If this is true, then he is not a man. He is still a little boy and wants the moon. I suppose he is rather unhappy about it. Those who say children are happy, forget their childhood. I wonder how long he can stave off manhood.’
The reality is that man would conceive in learning to compromise between home, society, civilization and individual freedom. Santa Roja, the woman, who symbolized the final harbor of his quest, thoroughly and painfully disclosed to him the blank end of his own dream. She pulled Henry out from the world of child-like dream to his world of manhood. This made it clear that he must give up a part of his dream and part of his freedom if he is to survive in this world.

John Steinbeck in this novel *Cup of Gold* dabbles into the tension and compromise between the individual and the society of the period – the Age of Depression. The exploration is further carried out in some of his other major novels.
TO A GOD UNKNOWN (1933)

Chronologically there has been some ups and downs in the publication of his next two novels. To a God Unknown was published in 1933, a year after the publication of The Pastures of Heaven in 1932. In spite of these dates, the 1933 publication of To a God Unknown has been taken as the second novel in spite of a publication in 1932 of The Pastures of Heaven.

Steinbeck had been working on this novel which grew out of a story called The Green Lady, for a few years at intervals. Evidence shows that it precedes The Pastures of Heaven in conception and probably in much of the actual writing. This novel searches the dark, primitive, natural human process, towards some kind of personal and natural resolution.
The novel *To a God Unknown* oscillates between the human and the animal, the pagan and the Christian, the sacred and profane and the conscious and unconscious value. The story begins in Vermont near Pittsford. The whole novel circulates around the protagonist Joseph Wayne and his three brothers, Thomas, Burton and Benjamin. Joseph Wayne and his father had a mysterious and mystical relationship. With his father’s blessing Joseph migrated to California, where he acquired land in the valley of ‘Nuestra Senora, the long valley of Our Lady’ in central California which was green and gold and yellow and blue when Joseph came into it.  

When he heard of his father’s death he started imagining that his father’s spirit had come to California and entered into a long ‘oak tree’. Steinbeck wrote:

> His eyes lighted with recognition and welcome, for his father’s strong and simple being which had dwelt in his youth like a land of peace, had entered the tree.

His other brothers also came to California, took land next to his, built their own houses and settled, constituting a big family community. As ranchers do, Joseph and his brother Thomas one day rode a little away from their house and reached a wood of pines.

Amidst the pine grove on a ridge at the back of the farm Joseph and Thomas discovered ‘an open glade’ which contained a huge rock of spring flowing from a cave in the rock. The significance of the ‘Oak tree’, the ‘rock’ and the ‘spring’ happen to be one of the main crux of the novel - *To a God Unknown*. This became also the focal point for Joseph’s procreative
and spiritual energy. Joseph married Elizabeth McGregor, a school teacher, who gave birth to a baby boy the following year. When Joseph tried to place his new born baby on the tree as a ritual, his god-fearing brother Burton tried to stop him. Burton protested but Joseph was adamant. He said:

‘I only want my son to love the tree’.  

The author described Joseph’s actions:

He (Joseph) stretch out his hands for the baby, and Elizabeth put the swathed baby in his (Joseph’s) hands. Burton (Joseph’s brother) looked back as he was entering his house, and he saw that Joseph was holding the baby within the crotch of the tree, and he saw how the gnarled limbs curved up protectively about it.

Thus, Joseph placed his son on the great ‘oak tree’ inspite of his god-fearing brother, Burton’s protest. This act of Joseph’s paganism outraged Burton who secretly tied a waist-band in the oak tree, left the Wayne farm for good and went away with his family to Pacific Grove. Thus the oak tree died. On his finding the tree dying, Joseph said:

This tree is dead,’ his mind cried. ‘There’s no life in my tree.

From thence onwards the winter rains had been plentiful and the land flourished.
When the oak tree died, winter became dry and steriled. His wife Elizabeth died when she fell from the ‘rock’ in the glade. The drought continued and the land became so dry that the other members of the Wayne family left their dwellings and drove their cattle to the green pastures near the San Joaquin River. But Joseph hanged on his ranch for some time, and then left his house and moved up to the glade. The spring in the glade also dried up. On New Year’s Day Joseph mounted the rock and sacrificed himself by slitting his ‘wrist’. As he died, rain began to fall on the withered land.

Critics evaluating the novel *To a God Unknown* have given their own views. They begin with the title. They raised question about the unknown God whom Steinbeck addressed in his novel. Interestingly, the novel is prefaced with some lines from the *Rig-Veda* which shows Steinbeck’s knowledge of different divine books.

The lines from the Rig-Veda runs as follows:

May He not hurt us, He who made earth,
Who made the sky and the shining sea?
Who is the God to whom we shall offer sacrifice?

*Veda.*

This is the God Unknown who leads with life and death. This is a God over Gods. In fact it is a transcendental spiritual ideal to whom man prays for his identity and salvation.
Peter Lisca wrote:

For *To a God Unknown* is concerned not only with the problem of “Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice (as the poem’s refrain indicates), but also with the nature of man’s proper relationship to that God.\(^{31}\)

Fontenrose has also written:

All gods are finally one God: the whole world is one living being.\(^{32}\)

All this makes one to think that there was some kind of paganism in Steinbeck’s line and length of thinking. The movement of Joseph Wayne has been considered to be outward and upward towards identification with the universal God-head or over soul. Thus the novel has been regarded as ‘mystical’. But Steinbeck’s views were quite different. In his opinion the novel was not mystical. It did not open outward but inward. It did not move towards God but towards man. It meant that the unknown God was not an extraterrestrial or mundane ideal, but the powerful and fruitful unconscious man.

Therefore, some critics have tried to point out how the author has shown the unconscious crossing into conscious realm of man’s life in his novels, particularly, *To a God Unknown*. 
To a God Unknown does not confine itself to the bounds of realism. In this Steinbeck explores and expresses various ideas, and one of them is romantic tendency. The characters speak a language used by a common man. The setting is substantially a region in California, and the action moves, through different aspects with the earthly ways of western farming, as its base. To a God Unknown is, explicitly, a strange story, its theme is the struggle for physical and spiritual fulfillment of the protagonist, Joseph Wayne. He has come from the East to 'the long valley of Our Lady in central California,' to live and farm. The land 'was green and gold and yellow and blue when Joseph came into it'. To him the act of fulfillment is natural fertility, which is a precious gift the earth and mankind must receive constantly. This gift has been considered from time to time in a mysterious and destructive manner. A couple of questions come to the mind such as how can fertility be ensured when women and animals become barren. When the land become barren and waste by draught, how can life be continued. The catholic priest of Nuesta Sanora believes that it rests in God's grace. More so, rain poured on the land just after Joseph's sacrifice by slitting his wrist on the 'rock' in the 'glade'. As a comparative study, it could be accepted as somewhat a saint like the one of R.K. Narayan's novel 'The Guide' where the hero fasted for rain and died of fasting. Here, it could be said that Walt Whitman also has an oriental touch according to his famous poem 'Passage to India'.

In fact, one may pray and hope to get the rain. The illiterate Mexicans who are Catholics, are really half pagan in their relation to nature and the seasonal cycle. They invoke the rain by magical tricks. They
welcome the rain in a wild, joyful and pagan ways. They dance beating the soft earth to slush with their feet.

The author wrote:

The pounding rhythm grows louder and more insistent, and the chanting voices become shrill and hysterical. They’ll be taking off their clothes,” the priest whispered, “and they’ll roll in the mud. They’ll be rutting like pigs in the mud.33

Fertility is, incidentally, an obsession of Joseph Wayne. In the words of the author:

He watched the heavy ceaseless lust of his bulls and the patient, untiring fertility of his cows. He guided the great stallion to the mares, crying, ‘There, boy, drive in’!34

Joseph even developed a negative idea against infertility. In the words of Steinbeck:

When he walked bare headed through the fields, feeling the wind in his beard, his eyes smouldered with lust. All things about him, the soil, the cattle and the people were fertile, and Joseph was the source, the root of their fertility; his was the motivating lust. He willed that all things about him must grow, grow quickly, conceive and multiply. The hopeless sin was barrenness, a sin intolerable and unforgivable.35
In this context, Joseph's first act on his acquiring new plots of land became meaningful to him. In the words of the author:

The hunger in his eyes became rapacious as he looked down the long green valley. His possessiveness became a passion. 'It's mine', he chanted. 'Down deep it's mine, right to the centre of the world'. He stamped his feet into the soft earth. Then his exultance grew to be a sharp pain of desire that ran through his body in a hot river. He flung himself face downward on the grass and pressed his cheek against the wet stems. His fingers gripped the wet grass and tore it out, and gripped again. His thighs beat heavily on the earth.

This was an act of copulation with thighs beating heavily on the earth. This is a primordial image, an act of propitiation and dying which prefigures Joseph's ritual sacrifice at the end of the novel. On the arrival of all the brothers and their families to the valley with the establishment of their home-steads, Joseph ruled over all the members of the family like a patriarch. Joseph is the source of order and life. He is somewhat like Abraham, in the Bible – Abraham ruling over the valley settlement'. Or the fisher king of the grail legend trying to bring rain to his wasteland. After his secret marriage with another wife he realized that he must channel his demonic sexual energy into a social process.

In Joseph's case the thirst for fertility was too great. He disclosed his feeling to his brother Burton and said:

If feeling could put a cow with a calf, I could mount a hundred. That's how I feel, Burton' ... 'I want
increase. I want the land to swarm with life. Everywhere I want things growing up'. ... Listen to me, Burton, I think I need a wife. Everything on the land is reproducing. I am the only sterile thing. I need a wife.37

He wooed his future bride Elizabeth because of his hunger for procreation, which could be regarded as reflection of his desire to bring fertility to the land and people living in it. His marriage to Elizabeth, a name which has been used five times in *Cup of Gold*, was hieroglyphic which meant to fertilize the whole realm. The powerful description of Joseph’s return to the valley with his bride makes clear in his powerful sexual illusion. The intention behind Steinbeck on this point, is that, the moment Joseph enters into the valley, he becomes the symbol of archetypal union of man and woman. It is also a consummation, which is again a symbol of all marriages. After their marriage, Joseph took Elizabeth to the mountain pass. But Elizabeth was afraid to pass through the dark side of the mountain into the sunlit valley. Joseph noticing her fear said:

Listen, Elizabeth. Do not be afraid. I tell you I have thought without words. Now let me grope a moment among the words, tasting them, trying them. This is a space between the real and the clean, unwavering real, undistorted by the senses. Here is a boundary. Yesterday we were married and it was no marriage. This is our marriage- through the pass- entering the passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy. This is a symbol of the undistorted real.38
Here Steinbeck takes the reader between the past and the future, memory and desire, a symbolic moment of transformation and rebirth enacted in a metaphorical hieroglyph. Elizabeth has been reborn. On reaching his ranch Joseph has learnt that Benzy, his younger brother had been killed by Juanito for an illegal sex act but Joseph was neither sad nor glad at the death of Benzy. He thought ‘All things are one, and all a part of me’. Joseph was a kind of secular God-head in the eyes of his family members. Rama, the wife of his elder brother Thomas, a woman of earthly knowledge, tried to explain her view of Joseph to the new bride, Elizabeth, in the family, she tells Elizabeth:

I tell you this man is not a man, unless he is all men. The strength, the resistance, the long and stumbling thinking of all men, and all the joy and suffering, too, cancelling each other out and yet remaining in the contents. He is all these, a repository for a little piece of each man’s soul, and more than that, a symbol of the earth’s soul.

Steinbeck with great subtlety, describes the physical and mental condition of Joseph. Joseph’s quest for a new life led him to paganism. He had a dual characteristic in him — sentiment and superstition. This combination in him developed a ‘reverence’ for the huge ‘oak tree’, under which he built his first house. This tree was the physical embodiment of his father’s spirit. He said — ‘My father is in that tree. My father is that tree!’. By and by he became fascinated with another natural object, a strange grove of trees enclosing a huge moss covered rock and its spring. This rock and spring became a focal point of the natural forces for Joseph.
The ‘rock’ and ‘the spring’ were the nature Gods for the immigrants during the Age of Depression, which the novelist, represents through the protagonist. Apart from this, the ‘rock’, and the ‘spring’ are symbols of good, evil, fear, peace, and fertility and destruction.

With the wedding of Joseph and Elizabeth, the rains came in plenty, their cattle increased and Joseph reached the heights of prosperity. As tradition goes, there was a fiesta on New Year’s Day for the inhabitants of the valley. It was on this auspicious day that Elizabeth broke the news to Joseph that she was ‘pregnant’. When the fiesta was in its climax, suddenly there was a severe storm, rain, thunder and lightning which ended the function abruptly disheartening the mood of the people. As months rolled on, in mid summer, a son was born to Joseph. He acted as a midwife himself. He took the baby and put it on the crotch of the oak tree. His brother Burton, a strong puritan, was shocked to see his brother’s paganism. Later on Burton left the land after cruelly girdling the tree. Right over the incident, the tree died and draught came in full swing. With the coming of autumn and that in late autumn, Elizabeth and Joseph went to the rock to see and feel the unseen power of the rock. This was the “Waterloo” for Joseph. Elizabeth climbed the rock on her own though Joseph warned her to be careful. She slipped from the rock and fell on the ground which broke her neck. Elizabeth died instantly due to the broken neck in the glade.

After her death a little rain fell which was taken by Joseph as a sign of fertility. In the very night of Elizabeth’s death, Rama, his brother’s wife
stood naked by Joseph’s bed. She aroused Joseph and offered her body thinking that the ‘king must remain potent to save the land. Rama said, ‘This is a need’. Rainless days continued and the land went dry, throughout the next year. Joseph blamed himself for their condition.

On the next New Year’s Day, Joseph went to the glade and found the spring in the rock stone dry. In fact, paganism was an obsession for him. He never learnt a lesson even after his son’s sacrifice (a symbolic thing as he laid his new born baby in the crotch of the oak tree) and his wife’s death of falling from the rock in the glade. On seeing the dry spring, he immediately sacrificed a calf again without any result, another failure. Then, lying on the rock, he thought the glade to be the heart of the land, and the source of the living seed. Again, fate played its role, and he slashed, his wrist with a pocket knife and the bleeding never stopped. The author wrote:

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.’

As he felt the driving rain he declared:

I am the land’, he said, ‘and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while.”
After he sacrificed a weak calf without any result and then slashing his wrist, with his knife as a sacrifice, the heavy rain began to fall on the long valley of ‘Our Lady’ in central California. This became complete with a metaphorical identification. Joseph’s sacrifice represented the one, made to the setting sun, by a strange old man of the coast, who claimed, ‘I am the last man to see it’. Every evening when the sun went down in the ocean, he killed some animal as a sacrifice to the setting sun. He also had the intention to sacrifice himself, when the condition were supposed to be proper. The thought of his sacrifice could help the sun as he said:

In the moment, I am the sun. Do you see? I, through the beast, am the sun. I burn in the death.

In Joseph’s case it also happened. In this context it could be said that Joseph represented natural religion as opposed to Christianity of his brother Burton. He, like the Heathens, brought together ancestors worship, tree and rock worship, fertility rituals and dying God associated with paganism. There was also his pantheism or a doctrine that ‘God is everything and everything is God’. In the epigram Steinbeck had used some lines from the hymn of the Veda asking ‘Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice’. The writer of the hymn has called-‘He is God over Gods’. The world is his body and He can hurt human beings because “His shadow is life, His shadow is death”.

The title of the novel reminds one of the Unknown God which St. Paul found in Athens (Acts 17: 22-29). Peter Lisca has suggested that the apostle was not speaking of Jesus and Christianity in particular but of ‘God
that made the world and all things’, and the novel has built up a balance between Hindu, Pantheistic, Christian and Anthropomorphic myths. Joseph’s last act of sacrifice is a ritual act in harmony with the season and weather cycle of nature.

From the standpoint of realistic canals, much of the novel is far fetched and eccentric. It is based on anthropological and mythopoetic sources, which became fashionable in the nineteen twenties, and in the long run it was also done by T.S. Elliot for his writing of *The Waste Land*.

The novel, at times, seems to be pretentious, and avoids the mundane and ordinary. The entire conception of the novel is strong, poetic and personal, a sense of ‘great vitality from every corner of the world about the novel’.

The greatness of the novel is not God who reconciles life and death, but Joseph Wayne himself. To be precise, for the Wayne family, Joseph is both literally and symbolically the source of energy, who can create symbols and fictions. Not only this, being a man of imagination, he explains the cosmogenic whole through symbols.

*To a God Unknown* is a lucid novel, a mythical visionary narrative of Steinbeck which deals with a Californian farmer’s struggle to build a family in a treacherous land during the ‘depression years’. In writing this novel, the author tries to universalize the ‘struggle’ involved in man’s
relation with the universe. It will be proper to mention here, the struggle of 'men' in California was due to the Age of Depression.

This 'age of depression' had a great impact in the mind of the author, as, his people suffered a great economic 'crash'. This crisis became one of the major themes in all his fictional writings. Therefore, Steinbeck takes his folks to different lands for exploring ways and means for a reasonable economic development, which also one experiences in his novel *To a God Unknown*. The scene of the people who fled their land during the depression was further reflected in his other novels and his next book *The Pastures of Heaven* is another such book in which some of the families fled their home land in search of luck and fortune during 'the depression'.
THE PASTURES OF HEAVEN (1932)

The same thematic ideas of the age and its people, in the Salinas Valley of California, is carried over into another great work, The Pastures of Heaven (1932).

When Steinbeck was struggling to give a final shape to To a God Unknown, he was busy writing a new work. In this new work he made an attempt to exploit the creative potentials of his home country in a realistic mode. The result was, the publication of The Pastures of Heaven in 1932. This novel is quite different from the first two novels, because, The Pastures of Heaven had a set of pictures, while To a God Unknown had its roots in the Californian soil. The Pastures of Heaven accommodated his insights and expressions of the common men.
Again, while the mood of *To a God Unknown* is sober and passionate, *The Pastures of Heaven* dealt with irony and humor, which, in the long run, would be one of his major trends in the later works.

*The Pastures of Heaven* was centered around a ‘sweet valley’ on the eastern side of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The name of the sweet valley till this day is known as *Las Pasturas del Cielo* or *The Pastures of Heaven*.

The novel opens at Las Pasturas del Cielo sometime around 1776, when Carmelo Mission of Alta California was being built. It is during this time a Spanish corporal discovered the pastures amidst the Lucia mountains, when, he set out with a squad of horsemen, in pursuit of the run-away Indian workers. The author wrote:

> ‘The troop made a difficult journey up the Carmel Valley and into the mountains beyond, a trip not less bewildering because the fleeing dissenters had proved themselves masters of a diabolic guile in concealing traces of their journey.’

As they marched on, they saw the valley around the ridge. The Spanish corporal was owe-stricken at its serene beauty. On seeing this long valley floored with pasturage on which a herd of deer browsed, the Spanish Corporal became completely entranced which the novelist described:

> this bearded, savage bearer of civilization slipped from his saddle and took off his steel hat’. ‘Holy Mother!’ he whispered. ‘Here are the green Pastures of Heaven to which our Lord leaded us.’
He was the first man who gave the name of Pastures of Heaven to this valley. In other words the Spanish corporal is somewhere personified as the ‘shepherd’ leading his horsemen to the Las Pasturas Del Cielo.

In fact, the first chapter is a prologue to the novel which is both ironical and self-contained. The Spanish corporal who hopped to return to Las Pastural Del Cielo died alone by contracting pox from an Indian woman.

This part forms an epilogue which re-established the wonder and hope expressed by the Spanish corporal. A group of individuals touring this area halted for some time and gazed down into the valley and were moved by its beauty. It was in the words of the author ‘a poem composed by the Lord Himself’. These tourists felt that good life with happiness and peace existed in that valley.

In course of time a few families of squatters occupied the land and settled there as the first settlers. Even after a gape of hundred years there were twenty families in Pastures of Heaven. There was a general store, a post office and a school house. The families lived in Pastures of Heaven peacefully and produced the finest fruit in Central California.

The prologue begins in 1863 when George Battle moved into the valley and took over a farm and the people of the Pastures of Heaven called it ‘Battle Farm’. George had come from upper New York State. Two generations lived on the farm and after that the farm was taken over by the
Mustrovics. Their coming to the Pastures of Heaven and their leaving it were sudden and mysterious. This was a family who had communication problems and could not speak English. The old Mustrovics go out seldom out of their residence. Only the young man worked on the land from sunrise to sunset.

They were a mysterious family. They lived in the kitchen and kept the other room shut most of the time. The hard working young Mustrovics made the land green and beautiful with fruits and vegetables. In the words of the author:

For two years he slaved on the soil. In the grey of the dawn he emerged from the house, and the last of the duck was gone before he went back into it.53

One morning, the neighbours of the Musrovics did not see smoke coming out from the Mustrovics kitchen chimney. On seeing it, Pat Humbert, driving to the store, said to T.B. Allen: ‘The place looks deserted again’54. On the fourth day Pat Humbert himself, T.B. Allen and John Whiteside knocked at the Mustrovics house. No reply came from the house. There was nobody in it. They found the place ‘rustlingly still’. It really did seemed deserted. They searched the house but it was vacant and was completely deserted. The Mustrovics had left, no one saw them go and no one ever saw them again. This farm house lay vacant for many years with weeds springing up and the farm, failed quickly. The people of the Pastures of Heaven were convinced that the Battle Farm bore a curse. There were something funny about the place, almost creepy, it would not
be hard for a fellow to believe in 'haunts'. Suddenly a pleasant shudder went through the people of Pastures of Heaven when they heard that the old Battle Farm was going to be occupied again. This rumour was brought into the General Store by Pat Humbert when he had seen vehicles at the gate of the old house. T.B. Allen, the store proprietor, said to his customers:

‘They say’. ‘They say the fellow who’s bought the Battle place is one of those people that goes about looking for ghosts and writing about them.’

The story of *The Pastures of Heaven* begins when Bert Munroe and his family taken over the Battle Farm which was reputed, to be under a severe curse.

T.B. Allen one day asked Bert Munroe his old question:

‘We always kind of thought that place was cursed. Lots of funny things have happened there. Seen any ghosts yet’? Bert admitted by saying: ‘I’ve been in a lot of business and everyone turned out bad’. When I came down here, I had a kind of an idea that I was under a curse’.

When he heard about the curse on the Battle Farm, he said:

Well, I just happened to think, maybe my curse and the farm’s curse got to fighting and killed each other off. I’m dead certain they’ve gone anyway.
On hearing this the group of formers who gathered around the General Storer all laughed with Bert Munroe. Then T.B. Allen added:

Maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated and gone into a gopher hole like a pair of rattlesnakes. Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crawling around the Pastures the first thing we know.58

He spoke more truly than he realized. While Munroe prospers, misfortune came to the other inhabitants of the valley. The Munroes' words and actions dropped the neighbouring people into despair, exile and even murder. Each of the Munroes took an unwitting part in the destruction of some hope and dream. The story of Edward Wicks who, in the long run, was called by the people of the valley 'Shark' Wicks 59 is the first example. Esq. Wicks lived in a small, gloomy house with his small family on the edge of the country road in the Pastures of Heaven. Edward Wicks had a blunt, brown face and small cold eyes almost devoid of lashes. He was known as the trickiest man in the valley. To be very brief, Shark Wicks paused to be a wealthy man with a reasonable wealth. But, the fact was, he was not what he paused, because he 'had never had more than five hundred dollars at one time in his life'.60

Setting his imaginary fortunes at fifty thousand dollars, he kept a ledger in which he calculated his interest and entered records of his various investments. These manipulations were the first joy of his life. Shark had a beautiful daughter called Alice, who was incredibly stupid. He glotted over her beauty and carefully guarded her chastity. One fine day Bert Munroe's
son Jimmy, who was terse and handsome of face danced with Alice and kissed her. When Shark Wicks heard about it he became very angry and went towards the house of the Munroes with a gun. But the Munroes made an agreement with the Wicks, by a bond to keep peace with the amount of the bond of ten thousand dollars. It is at this juncture that Wicks was compelled to confess the humiliating truth of his financial position.

On another occasion, Bert became the 'unwitting' agent to setting in motion, a series of events, which led Mrs. Helen Van Deventar to murder her insane daughter. Mrs. Munroe destroyed the idealic life of Junious Maltby and his son by giving the boy some new clothes. Events after events take place as the story moves on. The next was the two Lopez sisters who had been encouraging the patrons of their home restaurant by offering sexual opportunities in a friendly way. But the jealous Mrs. Munroe provoked them to enter the hard commercial life of a city brothel. Again, Bert Munroe’s attractive daughter Mae Munroe, while strolling by Pat Humbert’s house, said:

‘This house, with the rose over it, looks like that house in the picture. I'd like to see the inside of it’.  

This remark of Mae inspired Pat romantically. He took the trouble to remodel his house with the hope of inviting Mae to his house so that she may see the inside of the house. But his whole effort became meaningless when he discovered that she would soon marry a young Whiteside. Thus Pat’s expensive efforts became a despair and disillusionment.
Hence the different stories involved different individuals somewhat like ‘a play within a play’. Perhaps it would be proper to mention that Shakespeare had influenced the novelist Steinbeck who learnt to take different stories and events and put them artistically in the main stream of the novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*. ‘The baby curses’\textsuperscript{62} spurned by the Munroes afflicted almost everyone in the Pastures of Heaven. Despite the fact that the Munroes committed actions that were not intentionally malicious or designed to harm anyone. As a matter of fact they inflicted considerable damage on the life of many individuals in the valley. The story of Raymond Banks is one such story, where Bert Munroe can be directly responsible. Raymond used to visit his school friend, a warden at San Quentin prison to witness hanging as a kind of religious experience. Raymond Banks was a strong man of forty five with a fairly large farm on the northern flat. His thick, short arms, wide soldiers and hips and heavy legs, even the stomach bulged his overalls, made him seemed magnificently strong for pushing, pulling and lifting. One day when Munroe heard about Raymond’s visits to the San Quentin prison, he asked, Raymond Banks, to get him an invitation to witness hanging. When Banks did it, Bert backed out and said:

If you had any imagination, I wouldn’t have to tell you. If you had any imagination, you’d see for yourself, and you wouldn’t go up to see some poor devil get killed.\textsuperscript{63}
Bert Munroe's asking Raymond Banks for an invitation, Raymond's inviting him, then turning it down, and again finding fault with banks, all these causes ill-feeling between two persons. Bert further said:

> Just thinking about it last night, I felt the rope around my neck. Then I went to sleep, and the sheet got over my face, and I dreamed it was that damned black cap.\(^64\)

After that Banks lost his appetite for witnessing the scene of hanging at San Quinten prison and he stopped visiting the prison house. In such a way, Bert Munroe affected Banks' behavior. In the other stories, in the novel, a change of fortune took place, from an accidental or a totally innocent act of the Munroes. To blame them, totally, will not be proper. For instance, the true agent of Shark Wicks' downfall was Shark himself, because he over-valued his daughters' beauty and was neurotically obsessed with her chastity. Again, in the case of Pat Humbert, Pat overheard Mae Munroe, a girl of 19, admiring a white Banksia rose on the front of his house. She expressed her wish to see the interior of the house which looked like a 'Vermont house'. These remarks of the young lady egged Pat to make 'a room that's kind of like a Vermont room'\(^65\) and to think of marrying Mae but he told no one and found out too late that Mae would soon marry another man called Bill Whiteside.

In 1931 Steinbeck wrote a letter to his agents McIntosh and Otis explaining his purpose in *The Pastures of Heaven*. 
He wrote:

The valley was for years known as the happy valley because of the unique harmony which existed among its twenty families. About ten years ago a new family moved in one of the ranches. They were ordinary people, ill-educated but honest, and as kindly as any. In fact, in their whole history I cannot find that they have committed a really malicious act... But about the Morans there was a flavor of evil. Everyone they came in contact with was injured. Every place they went dissension sprang up. There have been two murders, a suicide, many quarrels and a great deal of unhappiness in the Pastures of Heaven, and all of these things can be traced directly to the influence of the Morans.66 ... I am using the following method. The manuscript is made up of stories, each one complete in itself, having its rise, climax and ending. Each story deals with a family or an individual. They are tide together only by the common locality and by the contact with the Morans.67

After going through the title minutely, a ‘peculiar evil cloud’ hanging over the American sky or the ‘Age of Depression’ during the thirties, is portrayed.

This idea of the author, becomes the main ‘purpose’ in all his novels through different stories; incidents, myths, situations, religious and atheistic ways, including the novel, The Pastures of Heaven under study. In The Pastures of Heaven, he reflects his ideas in a well-knitted way, from the beginning to the end with the help of various families in the
valley, over the years, generation to generation from the days of the Spanish corporal to the Munroes.

On analyzing Steinbeck's letter of 1931 one can, clearly 'see through' the basic plan of his work, *The Pastures of Heaven*. At the same time it seems to simplify the thematic purposes behind the harmful influences of the Munroes, on some members of the valley who normally had a peaceful happy life. The greatness of the writer becomes significant when he establishes the basic conflict between the Munroes and those who came in contact with them.

This 'peculiar evil cloud' is associated with the Munroes. Not only this, he unites the individuals influenced by the Munroes through their common approach to life, which works the other way round in the life of the Munroes. Characters in different stories such as Ed. Wicks and Pat Humbert, provide the focal point of a particular story in their own particular way, and then are influenced by a Munroe. They are influenced in such a way that either greatness or weakness is exposed. It is true, a Munro's act precipitates a change in the fortune of each story. On this, a question arises, such as to what degree were the Munroes culpable or blamed? Critics have varied answers to this. But critics in general, interpret the Munroes according to Steinbeck's intention, as expressed in his letter to 'McIntosh and Otis'.

This idea of the author becomes the 'bond of contention' in all his novels including *The Pastures of Heaven*. On analysis of the letter, one
will find how the trait of ‘Coincidence’ plays a vital role, in the ‘Age of Depression’ which Steinbeck shows through the Munroes and the individual stories of the common inhabitants migrated to California.

Keeping in view the purpose of Steinbeck, one can examine the story of Junius Maltby, a small young man with a decent education carefully. His life and health hazard led him to the Pastures of Heaven, more so, because of its worm climate, which suited him and his ill-health. There he started a new life by marrying a widow, having plenty of land and property. But again, as ‘Fate’ has his way, Junius lost his family and property, where ‘poverty sat crossed-legged on the farm’. In these circumstances, one of the Munroes led Maltby to leave the valley and go back to work in the city for a time. This act of advice by the Munroes, was for his better. Junius was now left with a child from his widow wife whom, he named Robbie, who grew up ‘gravely’ amidst a rugged life.

This life of Robbie, was due to the callousness of his father Junius. It was so he had no good clothes, no shoes or any thing decent. The people of the valley almost hated Junius. They had only pity for the little boy Robbie. The women folk in the valley told one and another, ‘how horrible it was to let the child grow up in such a squalor’. They waited for him to go to school until he is six and the least they can do is to ‘give the poor little fellow a few things he never had’.

As time passed on, Mrs. Munroe saw the rugged boy Robbie Maltby and she gave him new clothes, which touched Junius. However, with time
the status of Junius also was precarious. The farm rapidly went to ruins with the death of his wife leaving behind a hired hand and the son Robbie to be nurtured. Gradually all the three ragged and unkempt spent their time reading and talking. And when the time came Robbie had to go to school. Initially, he was against this idea of going to school and he told his father, ‘I don’t want to go’, said Robbie.70

When a curt letter was received from John Whiteside, Junius told Robbie-

‘Well, Robbie, I guess you’ll have to go’, said Junius, when he received it. ‘Of course, they’ll teach you a great many useful things’.71 Robbie’s only reply was ‘Why don’t you teach me’?72 He further insisted by saying “I don’t want to go at all. I don’t want to learn things”. On this, the father replied, ‘I know you don’t, but I can’t see any other way out’.73

And so, one fine morning, Robbie trudged to school, with an ancient pair of ‘overalls’ and a blue shirt. In the school despite his rags and poverty he became the ‘leader’ of the younger boys of the school which the author described:

Something self-possessed and mature about him made his companions turn to him for leadership.74

This was because of his vivid imagination and skill in inventing games; like, ‘slinky coyote, a local version of Hare and Hounds, and the
other named 'Broken leg', a kind of glorified tag'. The rules made for these two games were made by Robbie.

The Maltbies lived a kind of idyllic life but his neighbors condemned him for his ‘slothfulness’ and,

‘They outlawed him from decent society and resolved never to receive him should he visit them’.75

Junius was in a world by himself and he knew nothing about the ‘dislike’ by his neighbors. He was still happy in his unreal and romantic way of life. As the story moves on towards the last part, Mrs. Munroe goes out of her way and puts a bundle in Robbie’s arms and exclaimed- ‘What a nice little boy’.76 It was a little heap of new clothing. The Maltbies for the first time realized what the people were saying about them. Thus, with the feeling of sin, Junius and Robbie left the valley for San Francisco. And when Junius and his son were walking down the Pastures of Heaven road, Miss Morgan, a teacher of the school questioned Robert:

‘Why, Robert’, she cried. ‘What’s the matter? Where are you going?’ The man spoke. ‘We’re going to San Francisco, Miss Morgan.’ ‘Are you going up for the holidays?’ Miss Morgan asked. ‘No’, Junius replied slowly. ‘I guess we’re going to be up there for good. I am an accountant, Miss Morgan. At least I was an accountant twenty years ago. I’m going to try to get a job’.77
Again, this step taken by Junius was appreciated by some readers believing that work and responsibility are better than indolence.

Several of these stories are basically concerned with relatively normal individuals who are united by desire to live in accordance with a dream or vision. It was always, thought by the residents of the Pastures of Heaven that they suffered a change for the worse because of Munroes' interference in their affairs and with their design for living. The Munroes are constantly around, as if they had decided to alter the life of other people by destroying their hopes.

Steinbeck's primary interest seems to lie in the illusionary world of the victims of the Munroes. The author consistently portrayed the failures of his characters to sustain his dream in *The Pastures of Heaven*. At times, he varies the meaning of his story according to the degree to which the individuals are at false. Characters like Shark Wicks, Molly Morgan and Pat Humbert share a common failure of their inability to cope with time. Time plays an important role in the novels of Steinbeck. Time is a vehicle on which fate travels, which is clear from Shark Wicks who does not accept his real position in the valley, but creates an imaginary financial world. Molly Morgan wants to protect her childhood memory of her father, even at the cost of losing a pleasant home and a rewarding position of a teacher. Pat Humbert tries to escape the nagging gods of the memory of his parents, his hope to win the admiration and love of Mae Munroe, is not based on reality. In all the three cases, the failure of the characters is when they tried to stop the flow of time or deliberately and passively preserved
the past. They are unable to accept the change and became a victim of the inevitable flow and mutability of life.

The same is, again, in the case of the Lopez sisters. The sisters, Rosa and Maria are so filled with the simple joy of living. They converted the front room of their house into a restaurant. They put up a pine wood sign board on which the following words were written:

‘TORTILLAS, ENCHILADAS, TAMALEs, AND SOME OTHER SPANISH COOKINGS’, in R & M LOPEZ’.78

One day Maria Lopez gave Allen Hueneker a lift on her buggy on the way to Monterey. Unfortunately the Munroe couple saw Maria and Allen traveling together as the couple passed. On this Bert Munroe said:

‘Did you see that old woman-killer with Maria Lopez?’
And he added ‘Say’, Bert cried. ‘It’d be a good job to tell old lady Hueneker we saw her old man running off with Maria Lopez’.79

Mrs. Munroe’s reply was:

Don’t you do anything of the kind’, his wife insisted.
‘But it’d be a good job. You know how she talks about him’
‘No, don’t you do it Bert?’80
As a result of it, the Sheriff visited Rosa Lopez and said:

I have a complaint that you are running a bad house'.
You must close your doors or else I must arrest you
for running a bad house.  

Ultimately the two sisters had to leave the valley of the Pastures of Heaven. Maria consoled her sister and said:

Rosa', Maria cried shrilly. ‘I am your sister. I am what
you are’. ‘Rosa, I will go to San Fransisco with you. I,
too, will be a bad woman.  

Thus the role of the Munroes so far, made the Lopez sisters to leave the valley for a change of fortune to the other parts of America and also made Raymond Banks stop from enjoying a hanging in the Quinten Prison. This is again symbolic of the people leaving their homes during the ‘Age of Depression’. The period was unbearable for its horrors, and this horror turned it to sorrow and sorrow dwindled to sadness. These circumstances made the helpless people victims of fate and they moved for a pleasant life.

The different stories of The Pastures of Heaven present the most visionary of all hopes and dreams of people exposed to the ‘peculiar evil cloud’ which follows the Munroes who, happened to be the fulcrums of the novel. Apart from this, the different stories of The Pastures of Heaven dealt with the conflict between dream and reality. Amidst this conflict, a theme of ‘curse’ runs through all the stories. A dream of some kind of earthly paradise has been expressed in the title, the prologue and the
epilogue. The dream has been built upon the illusions, evasions, and neurosis.

Steinbeck does not deny the value of the dream in any of the stories. However, he suggests that man of imagination and feeling have to accept the cruel twist of fate that exists anywhere in the world if they are to succeed in fulfilling the dreams of harmony and peace and their harmony and peace is quite explicitly presented in the string of the stories, which built up this novel The Pastures of Heaven. In this novel reality defeats the dream. The greatness of Steinbeck lies, when, he makes us aware of the fact that all ordinary people play a major part in the world of dream and reality. To be more explicit, Steinbeck's primary concern is not the theme or form, but the people and place who are lovingly portrayed. For example, Steinbeck led his imagination around the less attractive characters, to name a few, Pat Humbert, the Lopez sisters and Junius Maltby.

Most parts of The Pastures of Heaven show Steinbeck's natural gift as a story-teller. The theme of the novel and its interpretations, varies from critic to critic as it is sprawling and episodic with the theme of curse and conflict between dream and reality. A famous critic, Peter Lisca has referred to the 'Eden theme' on a focal point of American experience. The creation of the garden of Eden and fall of Angels is somewhat like the Indians in The Pastures of Heaven who are described as abandoning religion and using diabolic means to escape. The Indians who had escaped settled in the pastures, with the twenty families in total. Steinbeck was hinting at the merging of the falling angels with mankind. Lisca thinks that
just as the pastures is the type of Eden, it is at the same time the world after the fall of man. Subsequently *East of Eden* (1952) happens to be the title of his later novel. The curse hangs over the valley and suggests original sin, and John Battle discovers a large snake which is the damned serpent and devil for him. Thus the novel, in some form, refers to Steinbeck's tendency to provide a broad foundation of mythical framework. The book may also be taken as a comment upon the earliest form of 'American Dream'.

This American dream is the dream of every citizen affected by the 'Age of Depression'. The economic battle of the Americans is continued in the novels of Steinbeck. And that is why, there was no full stops in Steinbeck's writings on life because of the age he lived in- the 'Age of Depression', which led him to continue writing even after *The Pastures of Heaven* so that there is a union between dream and reality.

The works of John Steinbeck, so far, make one easily feel that Steinbeck's primary interest is not the theme or the form or the stories but, the place and people which he described in a loving manner. And he carried out the same flow of writing on people who experienced the hard realities of life during 'the depression' in his next works.
TORTILLA FLAT (1935)

After *The Pastures of Heaven*, his next novel, *Tortilla Flat* (1935) is regarded to be the first novel to receive public response. It is the first full scale novel with a southern Californian environment for his characters and events. *Tortilla Flat* is different in mood and tone from the others, as the ‘*Cup of Gold*’ (1929) is heroic; *To a God Unknown* (1933) is tragic, and *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) is ironic. Regarding subject matter and technique, *Tortilla Flat*, published in 1935, indicates a special concern for an interest in people who were socially and economically dispossessed. These concerns were the results of the ‘Age of Depression’ during which the author lived. In other words the ‘Age of Depression’ had a great impact on Steinbeck and his writings. As a matter of fact, Peter Lisca has indicated
that after *The Pastures of Heaven*, all the works of Steinbeck have an 'episodic approach to plot and actions'.

*Tortilla Flat* deals with 'paisanos'. In 1935 society sunk deep into the economic and political crisis of the great depression. With the publication of *Tortilla Flat*, its comic tone and holiday spirit appeased the American readers. The characters in the novel were all paisanos, currently know as 'chicanos'.

The 'paisanos' were illiterate peasants 'a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican and assorted Caucasian bloods' whose ancestors have lived in California for a hundred or two years. They 'speak English with a paisano-accent and Spanish with a paisano-accent'.

Steinbeck's style in delineation of paisano characters is very lucid. In his *Tortilla Flat* Steinbeck wrote:

'They live in old wooden houses set in weedy yards, and the pine trees from the forest are about the houses. The paisanos are clear of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged, that system has not attached them very vigorously.'

Steinbeck dealt with such people who placed him in good state. On the one hand he could exploit the carefree, gay, joy, irresponsible world of the paisanos and on the other he explicitly and implicitly criticized the
various aspects of the respectable society of America. To visualize the story, and the plot, the opening paragraph of the novel is crucial.

Steinbeck wrote:

This is the story of Danny and Danny’s friends and of Danny’s house. It is a story of how these three became one thing, ... And this is the story of how that group came into being, of how it flourished and grew to be an organization beautiful and wise. ... In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated.\(^85\)

The story seems to be simple. Danny returns home from the war and finds that he has inherited two houses in Tortilla Flat from his grandfather. Private property and its problem were difficult to solve by the paisanos. When Danny took over the property he rented one of the houses to his friend Pilon. Regarding the rent, the author wrote:

Danny never asked for it, and Pilon never offered it.\(^86\)

Moreover, Pilon never had money for the rent. As time rolled on, Pablo Sanchez and Jesus Maria Corcoran, another two friends of Pilon also moved in with Pilon to the rented house. But they also never had money to pay the rent. When the rented house was burnt down, the relationship between Danny and his friend Pilon was stranded. Before this also the house rent was never paid.
When the second house was burnt, the three friends moved in with Danny. Then, the four friends allowed a man named Pirate who was a ‘huge, broad man, with a tremendous black and bushy beard’ with his five dogs, to the house with the hope to get a hoard of his money. He earned his living by wheeling his borough of pitchwood about the street until he sold the load. This was his daily routine collecting pitchwood and selling them. In fact six days a week he cut pitchwood. Pilon, the friend of Danny calculated and came to a conclusion that Pirate must have at least a hundred dollars, which can come handy if he stays with them. He got a bag of quarters explaining that he had vowed a golden candle stick to St. Francis for the recovery of a dog. However, ‘the bag of money had become the symbolic center of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved. ‘Friendship’ and ‘Fraternity’ became the Preamble of American philosophy and principles, which the fellow Americans, at that time stood by, because, the age demanded – The Age of Depression, caused by economic crash. Tortilla Flat reflects the condition of the Americans in the great depression. In one of their conversations Danny said:

Here we sit, homeless. We gave our lives for our country, and now we have no roof over our head.

It shows how people lived a miserable life in the depression years in America. As the story progresses, Big Joe Portagee, another paisano joined Pilon and his group of friends in Tortilla Flat. On joining the group, Joe stole Pirate’s bag and ran away. The group of friends, captured Joe in the beach, gave him a merciless beating, recovered most of the money,
removed his trousers and left him nude in the beach. Actually Pirate had already collected enough money to buy his candle as per his promise to St. Francis, if he found the lost dog. So, on finding, the dog he fulfilled his wish and he bought candle sticks for the ‘miracle sent by our good St. Francis’. As time rolled on the happy days of fellowship came to an end, and Danny deserted his friends and ran ‘amok’. On his return he was least less and melancholic.

To bring him and his spirit around, his friends gave him a big party which was attended by all in Tortilla Flat. Danny at last exhibited his furious activities, surpassing all his past exploits, drinking, wrenching and fighting. This shows, according to the people of Tortilla Flat, that Danny has been rapidly changing his form. He has grown huge and terrible. His eyes flared like the headlights of an automobile. There was something fearsome about him. Danny challenged the world and declared, if any one will fight with him. On this he exclaimed that he was the only person in this world to fight. He walked out of the room and declared:

Then I will go out to The One who can fight. I will find The Enemy who is worthy of Danny.90

He left the room, staggering a little, as he bent to get out of the door. The people of Tortilla Flat heard the roaring challenge of Danny outside the house. Then there was a crashing sound outside. Danny fell down about forty feet below on the ‘edge of the gulch’. The friends ran to his rescue and found Danny wounded in a serious condition and was breathing heavily.
The doctor and priest were called for as this was his last moment. And after some time he succumbed to the injuries and died. The entire crowd at Tortilla Flat mourned and wailed terribly. After two days, Danny was given a military funeral as per the Government rules meant for 'ex-soldiers' sons who wish it'. After Danny's demise the friends met at their round table to discuss 'thousands of climaxes on Tortilla Flat for every day the world wills through'. After the spectacular death of Danny, the house, which was the base of fellowship, was deliberately and ritualistically burnt.

Hence, again, fate plays its role with the people of the Salinas valley in California as portrayed by Steinbeck in his works.

Thus, on a careful examination, it shows that *Tortilla Flat*, presents a Catholic background and at the same time shows, both the dark ages and dignifies the paisanos. Joseph Fontenrose comments:

*Tortilla Flat* thus mingles seriousness with jest, enjoyment with deeper meanings. Its tone blends humor, bittersweet pathos, and the objectivity of a sympathetic and amused narrator of legendary events in a language just different enough from ordinary speech to be distinctive and to place the narrative at one remove from common place.\(^{91}\)

If the novel is analyzed critically there are many views. Some say, that it is a primitive celebration of uninhabited life or an ironic and comic version of the Arthurian myth. In this process the central thematic concerns
of the novel seems to have been obscure by complexities in the satiric form involved.

_Tortilla Flat_, published in 1935, is being not only the first novel to deal with immediate contemporary materials, but also to indicate special concern, and interest in the people who are socially and economically dispossessed. This is a concern and interest to be more elaborately dealt with in the major works of Steinbeck in the middle period of his career specially _The Grapes of Wrath_ (1939). As each century looks back, it has its own shape and quality, where the stream is continuous, and invisible as in the works of Steinbeck, each work overlaps into each other with its stream being continuous and invisible. Yet, its stretch of water has its unique character.
IN DUBIOUS BATTLE (1937)

The stretch of water being continuous one can sail from *Tortilla Flat* to *In Dubious Battle* where the nature of struggle between the haves and the have-nots, continues in some form or the other. Steinbeck with this novel was known to be a committed writer. The novel, in comparison to other earlier novels is different. The earlier novels, had quaint characters in their gothic setting which are replaced by modern party workers whose individual selves are subordinated to the party system. And it is here, in *In Dubious Battle* that Steinbeck was first involved on the labour problem, and was concerned with the social problems of his California setting.

The two novels of Steinbeck *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are considered, by the American readers as proletariat novels. These
novels deal with the lot of the working classes or any social or industrial problems, relating to them. Usually the proletariat kind of novel contains a considerable element of propaganda. However, the spirit of propaganda lacks the philosophical breath and imaginative power. The treatment of the proletariat theme is also well known in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

From the very inception, Steinbeck's writing showed his interest in people. He loved people specifically those who worked for their bread and butter in the open air, in the midst of fields and mountains. He had a love for natural beauty. They always appealed to him and touched his world of imaginative creation. He loved and liked strong and lusty people ready to fight and make love. He liked to see 'the mothers nursing the baby, people enjoying their food and enjoying the company of each other'. Then came agony and suffering. At times people began to think of the cause of suffering and developed theories. Of course these theories were not scientific but grew out of real experience. In fact, in fictional writing the idea of hopping people who suffered, a kind of social philosophy came spontaneously from the lips of people trying to find out a way through life's labyrinth and this finds its place in the novels of Steinbeck.

Steinbeck likes man who had courage and strength of mind which made them leaders. These qualities attracted him and created interest in different labour organizations, which dealt with industrial problems and disputes. In *In Dubious Battle* the thematic aspect of the story centres round these problems. It is the story of a strike in the apple orchard of California, due to the economic crash, (again the age of depression) such as
low wages, bringing the entire labour class under the caption generally known now, 'below poverty line'. It was a desperate fight between the bourgeois and the proletariats, which is one of the basic principles of communism laid down by Karl Marx. Doc Burton, known as 'Doc' in *In Dubious Battle* was more of a philosopher and sociologist, who regarded himself and his communist friends as products of forces throughout history. The novel is not a communist tract, but it has shown Steinbeck’s awareness of 'conflict between labour and commercial establishments'. Conflicts of this type alerted the big producers who were prepared with laws, guns, and dirty tricks. Again on this context the author seems to suggest the fact that what can not be solved by individual efforts, it is to be done through collective measures. Without this, there is nothing but starvation of the workers and their children. The leaders of such organizations have always their good faith, courage and their devotion. All these qualities are seen in the character of Jim, the new recruit who gradually developed the quality of leadership, whose death at the end, gives him the status of a martyr. His comrade Mac exploits his death in the speech he makes over Jimmy’s death-body, somewhat like Mark Anthony’s speech over the death-body of Caesar in the play *Julius Caesar*. Mac makes opening words of his speech –

“This guy didn’t want nothing for himself” he began. His knuckles were white, where he grasped the rail. “Comrades! He didn’t want nothing for himself”.
These are the last lines of his major novel *In Dubious Battle* which deals with a violent story of Californian fruit pickers in the lawless days of the thirties which is the ‘age of depression’.

*In Dubious Battle*, published in 1936, indicated a change in direction not only in this work but also in the other two major novels, *Of Mice and Men* (1935) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which were deeply involved in the contemporary social chaos of the ‘Great Depression’. All the three had a common denominator which was, the author’s continued interest in the underdogs of a predatory commercialized society.

In fact, Steinbeck wrote to Ms. Mavis McIntosh about *In Dubious Battle* in 1935 before he completed it:

I guess it is a brutal book, more brutal because there is no author’s moral point of view.  

This novel depicts the ignorance of social deserters and the political issues of the great depression. This great depression provoked Steinbeck to understand and portray an aspect of American life of his own time. His depiction made the novel a masterpiece or realistic and naturalistic work of content. Apart from this, the Great Depression, turned the inhabitants of the Salinas Valley on to the path of communistic ideals and principles, which gave birth to young leaders and labour organizations.
In other words the entire novel closely explores the life of the migrant workers and labour organizers. The depression and the atrocious attitudes of the big bosses created protests and revolts among the labour class. These revolts led to strikes. The strikers, after a lot of thought and deliberations, decided that the ‘strike’ must be organized without guns. Not only this Mac and Jim, the main-leaders exploit every spark of hostility and a chain of violence begins causing anger and suffering among the strikers. The novel gives a sardonic picture of ‘human bondage’ which is the result of the ‘Great Depression’. The same human miseries during the depression continue in his other works.
A file photo showing victims of the "dust bowl" disaster as described in Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath.*
YEARS OF DUST

ADMINISTRATION
Rescues Victims
Restores Land to Proper Use

A poster offering help to the victims of the "dust bowl" disaster which Steinbeck describes in his novel The Grapes of Wrath.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1939)

Steinbeck took up the subject of basic problems like social, political, economic capitalistic and class struggle which were growing in his mind and imagination in his next novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, published in 1939. These issues in the thirties were, of course, due to the Great Depression, which, ransacked the 'Okies' from Oklahoma to California. Incidentally Steinbeck himself also made a trek to the west along with the homeless families. All these incidents and episodes became the sum and substance of his next novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. This shift from Oklahoma to California is symbolic as it shows the life instinct and their movement towards the 'promised land'. But it was not what the Okies wanted. There was still human suffering, starvation and struggle for survival. This time it was not only the Great Depression, but also the fight between the rich and
the poor. The greatness of the Okies was that, they had the will to live and faith in life. So they were not defeated. Perhaps, this idea could also be compared to that of Ernest Hemmingway’s novel *The Old Man and Sea*, where the author pronounces through his protagonist that ‘a man may be destroyed and not defeated’. In the words of Steinbeck:

Women and children know deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole.\(^{94}\)

This idea is elaborated in *The Grapes of Wrath* where Steinbeck gives the picture of a ‘turtle crossing the highway’ as an act of obstinacy and persistence against heavy odds.

Prior to the nineteen thirties’ age of depression, America faced one of the greatest disasters i.e. around 1889 the Johnstown flood occurred which created a shock and dismay over the destruction and loss of life; where thousands of people were killed. Again a similar incident which took place in the thirties, was not a flood but a ‘Dust Bowl’, storm and dust causing havoc among the people in America specifically Oklahoma, of course with no death. In other words, with an interval of four decades that is 1889 and 1939, it seems, to hang on the Americans’ life a cloud- ‘dark, dark, dark cloud’. Here we are reminded of Walt Whitman of the 1889, who wrote about ‘the young, the fair, the strong, and the good with their household wrecked, the husband and the wife, the forger and his forge, were drawn to “thee”(God). Again, the same thing happened in 1939 when
all were drawn to God, but it was a make-shift from Oklahoma to California, to save themselves from the miserable agony.

Keeping in mind, the philosophy of the proletariat, Steinbeck deals with varied themes like buying and selling of second hand goods, large scale economy, profit and downfall with, of course, all his characters, big and small who represent the ‘age of depression’.

Further, as one goes assiduously through the pages of the novel, John Steinbeck shows that, there is no economic stability among the Okies, who were very badly hit by the ‘age of depression’. Even the economic source, which is the banks, became ‘monsters’ for the inhabitants who left their land and property for a bright future.

There is a theme of ‘common interest’ as opposed to private and exclusive interest. There is a remarkable chapter in which the author has shown a debate between tenant farmers and agents of the banking syndicates. It is here and in the course of the debate the agent speaks of the banks as monsters who said:

We’re sorry. It’s not us. It’s the monster. The bank isn’t like a man.
Yes, but the bank is only made of man.95

On the whole Steinbeck has managed to give an expression of a deep social malaise by way of a parable, with allegorical figures, and with biblical simpleness. ‘The themes are expressed in spontaneous words of the
Okeis’. Most of them are abstract and theoretical, while the author expressed his views. In fact, Steinbeck became more effective when he puts his views in the mouth of the characters. This was the way he created great fictions. Again, this was the way Steinbeck raised propaganda to the level of art. Some critics describe *The Grapes of Wrath* as a social document of great educational value, a significant work portraying the famous ‘age of depression’ of the thirties vividly appealing to the imagination of the readers by means of art.

Americans in the nineteen thirties, were aware of the fact that the long term social and technological changes were breaking down and altering the simple and harmonious relation between man and nature. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is said to have its origin from the calamities of the ‘Great Depression’. The period showed both depression and drought in the central prairies. Both these destructive forces made thousands of farmers bankrupt and forced them to leave their farms and join the millions of the unemployed Americans in their struggle for survival. There was a cruel process of a large scale commercial and industrial exploitations of the land.

After the publication of *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck made a tour of ‘Hoovervilles’, the itenerant workers’ camps in the Salinas and San Joaquin valleys. He picked up the field labourers from the fruit orchards and cotton fields and reported their miseries in the San Francisco News in a series called ‘The Harvest Gypsies’ (October, 1933) which was later published in a pamphlet form called *Their Blood is Strong*. He explored the problem of the people thoroughly. He understood them and was with
them. In fact in 1937, at Oklahoma, he joined the migrants who were going west, he worked with them in the fields after their arrival at California.

Peter Lisca in his *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* reports that this expedition to the writing of a novel called *L Affaire Lettuceburg*, Steinbeck was not satisfied with this book and so he did not allow it for publication in 1938. In a letter he complained:

> My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other and then I deliberately write this book, the aim of which is to cause hatred through partial understanding.96

The general purport of this remark suggests that he was still not in a proper frame of mind which was seen in *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*. The author went back to work on the novel that summer. He wrote:—"I am desperately tired", he wrote, “but I want to finish. And mean".97 In the summer of 1938, he re-wrote the book which would be entitled *‘The Grapes of Wrath’* a phrase borrowed from Julia Ward Howe’s popular ‘American Battle Hymn of the Republic’. Ultimately the book was published in April 1939 which became an instant success and has won many national book awards including the Pulitzer Prize in the same year. The novel was so popular that John Ford under the banner of the 20th Century Fox productions directed a motion-picture.

The novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, consists of 30 chapters of which 14 chapters carry the story of the Joad family. The last 16 chapters generally
called inter-chapters, are, either expository essays or sketches of typical situations and circumstances in the great migration. The whole novel presents the social, economic and historical background of the story of all the migrants. Astonishingly, this novel being the major work of Steinbeck, has a little plot in the ordinary sense; the main action of the novel is quite simple. There are no intricate involvements of characters with character, and no mess of events. The story of the Joads is the story of a real family. The Joads, a family of 3 generations were dispossessed by draught and depression, of their Oklahoma farms. The journey from their farms to California was a grueling journey, where the Joad family faced death, desertion and separation. The family experienced unemployment, social chaos, exploitation and starvation. Throughout the novel runs a persistent intelligence. Because of this F.W. Watt states that to a certain degree the term ‘epic’ may be justifiably used for the novel.

The ‘Great Depression’ struck America a painful and bewildering blow. It was not simply a case of disruption, poverty and hardships. After all, America has a history of long struggle by the pioneers. This was not only the struggle of the Americans but also of ‘man’. And the appropriate statement given by Steinbeck on accepting the Nobel Prize for literature in Stockholm, in 1962 justifies the same. He declared:

“Humanity has been passing through a gray and desolate time of confusion”. 98

When he made the statement one can conclude that the Age of Depression was still playing on his mind. The important point to be noted
in that novel has embodied a philosophical and psychological impact of the national tragedy, the destruction of the great American dream, half material and half spiritual. America was supposed to be a new Eden or God’s country. But in the thirties it became a purgatory not paradise. Everywhere men were traveling on foot, by old cars, towards the west, searching for the promise they could not believe that America would deny them.

The beginning of the novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* is very memorable, as Steinbeck realistically described the dust bowl:

In the morning the dust hung like fog, and the sun was as red as ripe new blood. All day the dust sifted down from the sky, and the next day it sifted down. An even blanket covered the earth. It settled on the corn, piled up on the tops of the fence posts, piled up on the wires; it settled on roofs, blanketed the weeds and trees.\(^99\)

The whole of the first chapter has a symphonic effect, with slow and lingering of movement of the dispossessed people, the farmers. The small farmers were ruined by drought or lands taken away by companies and banks. Steinbeck portrays a world in which man and nature, the society and the land, were crippled and dying. The coming of the tractor, a rudeless monster cutting across the land, became a symbol of a disastrous breaking down an old way of life:

But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself.
When the corrugated iron doors are shut, he goes home, and his home, and his home is not the land.\textsuperscript{100}

The financial structure of the country collapsed in the depression, and soil itself failed. Man and earth alike inherited a social system. Everything was in sixes and sevens. There was no proper planning among the tenant farmers and the migrants. It was a dust storm that led the banks to take over the land of the poor peasants who were at one time good property owners. The novel, through the Joads, depicts how their bones with their land were broken. At this stage when they were preparing for migration, Grand Pa Joad refused to go, because he did not want to leave the land which he had known so long:

I ain’t sayin’ for you to stay’, said Grampa. ‘You go right on along. Me – I’m stayin’. I give her a goin’-over all night mos’ly. This here’s my country. I b’long here. An’ I don’t give a goddamn if they’s oranges an’ grapes crowdin’ a fella outa bed even. I ain’t a-goin’. This country ain’t no good, but it’s my country. No, you all go ahead. I’ll jus’ stay right here where I b’long.\textsuperscript{101}

Grand Pa was shocked and did not survive the uprooting of his folks to California and died on the way before they get out.

When the Joad family and others read the pamphlets distributed by the Californian Growers’ Association, offering work, and set out for a new life, they did not realize that they were a part of a vast social movement. The old automobiles that hurtled along the road is highly symbolic. The
The great madding of American society in the thirties was the archetype of those cars, antiquated, patched up and limping noisily and precariously along the high way. The path, the Joads followed were many and difficult. The author said:

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight.\textsuperscript{102}

The farmers who were once land owners are now becoming landless people. The drought and dust-bowl made them rootless, hungry people looking for work and their number increased like flood water—three hundred thousand in California and more coming. And in California the roads were full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work. For every man man-load to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it, for every stomach-full of food available, five mouths out. Such was the precarious conditions of the migrants in the age of depression. But, the inhabitants of the areas through which they passed received them differently. Some received them with kindness, sympathy and gifts whereas others received them with cruelty, fear and blows.
As they covered the journey, they saw suddenly the great valley of vineyards and orchards, green and beautiful, the farm houses and the distant cities, and, the little towns appeared before their eyes. But the beautiful paradise in front of them was found to be a fallen world. The place was filled with suffering like the place from which they fled. The irony was, in that country they were called "Okies" and the labour camps on the outskirts of the town were known as Hoovervilles. Hooverville which was to be their home was surrounded by rich land owners and controlled by large impersonal companies. The Okies and others were hired for daily wages which covered their daily food. Gradually the wages were cut, and if there was any protest they were beaten and driven off. Steinbeck portrays the land as fertile and not sick but the system that is supposed to distribute the land's fruitfulness has broken down. In other words there was starvation and the produce from the land were being destroyed because it would not fetch the targeted price at the market. Thus, there was stagnation, corruption and decay.

This is the California the Joads had come to a country about to reap a harvest of violence. The point to which the book is moving is really not provocation.

Steinbeck's intention was perhaps to make the readers understand, human suffering and the will to resist it.

In Steinbeck, like Hemingway's, the speeches and the instruments of writing was purely in an American way. Steinbeck follows this trend by
reproducing American speech in The Grapes of Wrath. His purpose was to convey a general effect rather than an individual one. The chapter using American speech occurred at frequent intervals throughout the book.

Further the chapters are devoted to those people who had moved away from home, the topography of their journey and what they will find at the end of it. In fact these chapters are very important in the whole structure of the novel. They have a power to catch the essential spirit of that sprawling movement towards the west. Steinbeck in The Grapes of Wrath presents plenty of American places, names and things. This can not be said to be a literal speech reproduction, but as a well musical suggestion giving a far greater sense of reality.

The Grapes of Wrath is read at various levels. At the level of characters one has to examine the westering experience of Tom Joad, who was a 'great one', his mother, and a runaway preacher Jim Cassy. Cassy openly bears the conceptual values of the novel. He explains to Tom Joad as to why he left preaching, not merely because of the fact that religious faith which according to him, set up codes of behavior denied human nature and its proper expression. He said:

There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do. It’s all part of the same thing.104

This has got nothing to do with the ethical and religious compulsion. There is some kind of an Emersonion transcendentalism which replaced the
metaphysics of Christianity which the author expressed through his character Jim Cassy who said:

I says: ‘What’s this call, this sperit?” An’ I says: “It’s love. I love people so much I’m fit to bust, sometimes."

Finally when Cassy was picked up by the deputy and his men, and when Tom was outlawed, he (Tom) moved beyond personal anger and revenge to become a disciple of Jim Cassy. Apart from this there is a mysterious process taking place in the novel. The persecuted and dispossessed people are drawn together by their helpless suffering, loneliness and their sense of injustice which were common to all in the ‘age of depression’.

The Joads were exclusively concerned for family interest but in a broader prospective they co-operated to all oppressed people. As their family fortune declined, the family moral also declined. While the family grew weaker the united workers grew stronger. The family which was no longer stronger faded into the communal unit of the united workers. Many families became one and the children were the children of all. The loss of homes became one lost, and they long for a golden time in the west which also became a dream. A world was created every evening and dissolved the next morning, and was recreated the next evening – the ‘dream’ to be in a golden world.”
These are the main characteristics of collective people, who can be regarded as group-organism and the novel can be read as a story of group organism. The tractor which has been described as a monster in *The Grapes of Wrath* was a visible symbol of group-organism. Steinbeck described the conflict of organisms as necessarily an ecological struggle and disturbance of an ecological cycle. It is just like a cycle operated in ‘California’s agriculture, and the migrants driven from their homes, were absorbed into it’. Critics have noticed these biological feature in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In fact, Steinbeck has not ignored the biological and organismic aspect of the novel, although he has emphasized the mythical side in the structure of the novel. It will not be improper at this point to delve into the title. The novel’s title, taken from ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’ is, itself a relevance to the Revelation: “And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the wine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine press of the Wrath of God” (14:19). And the meaning of the symbol is mentioned in the novel’s inter chapters:

In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.  

In this context, the conflict of organisms and the role of some individuals cannot be ignored. Ma Joad embodies a fundamental and even pre-ideological force in the novel. She has been the main focus of the novel from her first appearance in the fiction. Just as Jim Cassy has been perpetuated by Tom Joad, similarly, Ma Joad’s spirit has entered into her
daughter Rosa Sharon. Her courage survives every adversity, who ensures the longevity of the race.

Ma Joad is a unique lady who has her own way of dealing with people by her intrinsic gentleness combined with inner resilience. This nature of her comes to one’s knowledge when she has a striking conversation between herself and the little man at the company’s store at a ranch in the novel. In the beginning the man enjoyed her discomfort at the higher place in the store and at a distance of the nearest town from where she come. It was due to her nature and the words she used during the conversation that she came out triumphant.

In the early part of the novel Ma Joad’s daughter, Rose of Sharon behaved as a self-centred adolescent, full of complaints for her self and the child in her womb. But in the last chapter of the novel, there was a profound change in her and she became closer to her mother.

Their attitude and temperaments were due to the sufferings of the migrant workers. These sufferings were culminated in the driving rain storms and the destructive flood which resembled the angry gesture of her revengeful Lord of the Old Testament. Even if her own child was born death, Rose of Sharon was still to give life. It is truly Ma Joad, who urged her daughter to a striking action, which brought the novel its controversial and notorious conclusion.
The author said:

Ma’s eyes passed Rose of Sharon’s eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl’s breath came short and gasping. She said: ‘yes’.

Steinbeck described the action of Rose of Sharon in a very striking manner. He wrote:

For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comforter about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast, ‘You got to’, she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. ‘There!’ she said. ‘There’. Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.

This description is quite sensational. For Steinbeck, this episode has become a skillfully contrived symbol of life principle expressed in Ma Joad’s statement. Further this episode is a powerful symbol of human life persisting despite the hostility of society and nature.

In a broader sense the novel has a literal and historical level. It tells the story of certain characters doing certain things at a certain time and in a certain place. The Joads are fictional characters, but were prototypes of the
immigrants with whom the novelist was closely associated. Therefore, at this level *The Grapes of Wrath* may be regarded as a sad-tale of the dispossession of the Oklahoma share-cropers and their migration to California in search of work and a new home in the 'great depression'.

From another level, one may look at the Joads allegorically. They symbolized all the dispossessed persons, everywhere, who had suffered and had set out, against enormous odds, in pursuit of their dream. The novel also could be looked at from moral and ethical perspective. Tom was concerned with right and wrong who rises from sin to grace. One may remember that Casy expressed not a hope of "pie in the sky" but outrage at 'man's inhumanity to man'. The novel seems to express the hope of a land of 'eternal glory', beyond the chaotic flux of man's material existence. One may remember what Tom said to his mother when he had to leave:

> Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where-wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' — I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an'they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build-why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.109

There is also a lot of confusion and nothing can be said with a sense of certainty. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a part of the endless story of the striving life-force "to manifest itself". This is well exemplified by the turtle
episode which was shown as a perspective of the ‘struggle between a
dynamic creative force seeking to exert itself to the inbuilt obstacle to its
self-realization’.

Besides all these *The Grapes of Wrath* contains fine descriptive
passages, incidents, and unforgettable thoughts with half-digested
Christianity and profane utterances. All these have been explicitly
expressed in a kind of prose having an incantatory effect arousing deep
feeling. The nature of the inter chapter blending with the prose style in the
rest of the novel is remarkable. The colorful folk idioms and figurative
language used by the migrants were very effective in Steinbeck’s depiction
of American people, scenes and folkways, projecting, “the portrait of a
substantial portion of a people, their political and religious beliefs, their
music, manners, stories, jokes; their essentially pioneer character, with its
virtues and its limitations.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a work of art rather than of politics and
sociology. But the personal and social drama in the novel is powerful.
Despite its flows, the novel has an imaginative power and generosity of
heart rarely equaled in American literature. With its publication in 1939,
Steinbeck had set up a monument to mark the highest point of his own
career, and the nadir of America’s social history describing life in America
in the Great Depression which he carried over to another novel of the
forties *The Wayward Bus* (1947).
A file photo of the people during the Depression years showing unemployed men eating free bread and soup.
The Depression years: unemployed men eating free bread and soup
THE WAYWARD BUS (1947)

After the publication of The Grapes of Wrath in 1939, The Wayward Bus is Steinbeck’s first full length novel after World War II. In this he tried to offer a moral vision regarding the post-war years in the post-depression era.

To tackle the problems confronting him, Steinbeck developed an allegorical framework. The bus in The Wayward Bus is a dilapidated vehicle. Steinbeck wrote:

... carrying passengers who had been deposited at Rebel Corners by the big Greyhound busses to San Juan de la Cruz and bringing passengers back from San Juan de la Cruz to Rebel Corners, where they
were picked up either by the Greyhound bus going north at four-fifty-six or by the Greyhound going south at five-seventeen.110

A representative group of characters make the trip. During the trip, the passengers, amidst the isolation, they interact with each other, which reveal their underlying characters. It will be proper to mention, here that it reflects the Canterbury Tales of the 14th century British poet, Choucer who depicted a group of pilgrims on their journey and who stayed one night in an inn. In The Wayward Bus, the driver is called Juan Chicoy. The author wrote:

‘He was a fine, steady man, Juan Chicoy, part Mexican and part Irish, perhaps fifty years old, with clear black eyes, a good head of hair, and a dark and handsome face’.111

His assistant is called Pimples Carson. There is another character called Norma who is a shy and drably dressed girl hired by Chicoy for his store and service station run by his wife Alice, who is quarrelsome and drinks too much. The girl has a crush on Clark Gable, the Hollywood actor and fantasizes about being a movie star herself. She wrote a twelve-page letter which began, “Dear Mr. Gable”, and ended, “Lovingly, A friend”.112

Among the passengers there is the family of the Pritchards. Mr. Pritchard is a conservative and conformist businessman. His wife Bernice seems to be sweet and gentle. She used this quality to hide her defect, and to dominate over her husband. The daughter Mildred is a college student, sexually promiscuous. One of the passengers, Ernest Horton is a war veteran, and a
traveling salesman of gadgets. Camille Oaks is a striper. Van Brunt is a quarrelsome old man with a heart condition, warning everybody in the bus that heavy rains might wash out the bridge over a river across the road.

As the journey proceeds, Juan Chicoy drives the bus to the river, and finds the bridge in danger of being washed away by flood water. He takes an abandoned old road and deliberately mires the bus in the mud as an excuse to abandon it, his wife, his responsibility, and then proceed on fact towards Mexico. On the way he goes into a barn and sleeps. There Mildred Pritchard catches up with him and seduced him. Meanwhile Mr. Pritchard offers Camille Oaks a job in his firm. Jolted by this, Pritchard reacts by raping his wife in a cave where they have taken shelter. Pimples makes sexual advances on Norma, who fights it off successfully. Van Brunt has a stroke, and is dying. Then, after making love to Mildred, Juan gives up his ideas about Mexico, returned the placed where he left his bus, digs the bus out, with the help of the passengers and takes the passengers further on to San Juan de la Cruz.

_The Wayward Bus_ seems to have been written according to a formula. In this rigorously realistic, down-to-earth, story of a group of ordinary people traveling on a bus across central California, there is nothing of the sit-aside, raised-up feeling produced by all folk stories. But, the novel is intended to be some kind of a parable or an allegory. Traveling from Rebel Corners to San Juan de la Cruz, the passengers may be supposed to be pilgrims progressing from sin to salvation which was totally different from the pilgrims in Chaucer's _Canterbury Tales_, of course, with
the journey revealing the characters. The driver Juan Chicoy has the same initial as that of Jesus Christ. Such thing happened in another novel of Steinbeck—*The Grapes of Wrath* where a character named Jim Cassy scarified himself to defend Tom Joad, which also seems like Jesus Christ.

The bus, formerly named “*el Gran Poder de Jesus*”, meaning “the great power of Jesus”, has been “Sweetheart”. From the windshield hangs a plastic doll, a tiny boxing glove, a baby’s shoe and an icon of the “Virgin of Guadalupe”. Juan Chicoy occasionally prays to the Virgin and makes a wager that sees a warning sign, “Repent”. The bus is wayward, in some sense because it carries a representative group of human beings on some kind of modern Canterbury Pilgrimage.

The journey is handicapped by recalcitrant or resistant passengers, floods and precarious bridges, until it gets stuck in the mud, mainly because the intention of the driver is to get rid of the boredom of driving with full of uninterested passengers. In the words of the author:

His mind plunged with pictures of the sun-beaten hills of Lower California and the biting heat of Sonora, the chill morning air on the plateau of Mexico with the smell of pine knots in the huts and the popcorn smell toasting tortillas. And a homesickness fell on him like a sweet excitement. The taste of fresh oranges and the bite of chili. What was he doing in this country anyway? He didn’t belong here.
His mind does not stop here. It continues to remember more things. Steinbeck wrote: ‘The curtain of the years rolled back … little modest dark girls in blue rebozos’.\textsuperscript{114}

This gives rise to a crisis, which strains and reveals the true selves of the passengers. In \textit{The Pearl}, another novelette of Steinbeck, the wealth of parabolic meanings are quite obvious and fluently expressed. But, in \textit{The Wayward Bus} the parabolic or allegorical meanings are more reticent, keeping its conceptual implications closely sealed in its naturalistic form.

However, this novel is said to be built up in accordance with the compulsion of an allegorical or a ‘morality’ framework.

One can, perhaps, say that the bus was undertaking a journey towards death. The novel can be regarded as an examination of a fallen world, showing clearly ‘how transitory we be all days’. It shows how the lives of the modern pilgrims are far removed from the dignity and permanence of meaningful lives. The passengers are not people like those in \textit{Cannery Row} and \textit{The Pearl}, who are the outcasts, the withdrawn or the defeated. The passengers in \textit{The Wayward Bus} are respectable members of a group. The basic intention of the novel seems to be the creation of a suitable atmosphere in which they may reveal their honesty or their hypocrisy and self-deception. In this connection, it will be proper to have another look at the character of Juan Chicoy.
In spite of all the suggestions of Christian religiosity in his character, there is still something unconvincing in it. His relationship with Mildred, apart from his transcendental role and superior objectivity, has obscured the credible earthiness and streaky cruelty in his character. One has simply, to remember that the novel is a realistic story told as a morality play. Midway in the cross-country trip, the bus bogs down in the mud. Juan Chicoy is on the verge of abandoning his passengers, his job, and his wife, who remains back home at the bus-depot and who is in the process of drinking herself into oblivion. He wants to shed his burden and responsibility in favour of a carefree and irresponsible life in Mexico. But in a nearby barn, Mildred finds him and virtually seduces him. For Chicoy, it is a brief sensual affair which he accepts frankly and pleasantly. For Mildred, it is a moment of freedom and emancipation, a throwing-off of the crushing family yoke and the accompanying inhibitions. And, after the affair in the barn, Chicoy returns along with Mildred, digs out the bus and drives it to its destination. Steinbeck intended Juan Chicoy to be some kind of a deity in the all-too-human world of The Wayward Bus.

Van Brunt, who suffers a fatal stroke on the way, may be regarded as Death in person. He insists on making the trip with the others even though he points out certain dangers associated with the bridge. At the first bridge he refused to stay before reaching the destination. Most of the critical treatments of The Wayward Bus concentrate on the allegorical framework. It may be said that the novel’s fabulous and allegorical intentions have been clearly set forth in its epigraph. In the novel there is constant reference to sin, but very little repentance. No one is in any way closer to
salvation at the beginning, except a vague recognition of their own weakness. Peter Lisca in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* concentrates on the allegory in the novel by dividing the characters into ‘three main groups, the dammed, those in purgatory, and the saved ones. The dammed ones are Mr. Elliot Pritchard, Mrs. Bernice Pritchard, Alice Chicoy, Louie (the first bus driver), and Norma. Those in purgatory are Mildred Pritchard and Pimples, and the saved ones are Juan Chicoy, Ernest Horton, and Camille Oaks. But this division seems to be too easily dogmatic, and some kind of a superimposition on the whole structure of the novel. However, it may be said that the novel’s use of archetypal sources is creative, not imitative. The personifications and circumstances of an allegorical play are not found.

Basically, *The Wayward Bus* is a novel about illusion and reality, success and failure, frustration and fulfillment, and sex or masculinity and femininity. Mr. Pritchard, the successful, conservative and self-important businessman has failed into two ways. The shoddiness of his professional moral is exposed by the bluntness of Camille Oaks, who has hinted at the difference between a hired private secretary and a mistress. Neither Ernest Horton nor Camille Oaks are admirable products of their society. Ernest Horton is an ex-serviceman who makes his living by selling comical gadgets (artificial sore toes, a short glass in the shaped of toilet bowl).

But they have some redeeming features in that they are honest about themselves, and they know how to survive in their world. Mrs. Pritchard is a woman living in hypocrisy and illusion with her husband. She is a type of
the sexually-frustrated gentle-lady, who had long back persuaded her husband that his sexual desires were gross and sordid, and who sees the world as coarse and vulgar until she can translate it into chatty, amusing letters to her friends at home. Norma lives in a world of movie stars and vicariously enjoyed glamour. Pimples is also a victim of the movie industry, drifting into amorous or heroic reveries to compensate for the frustrations of his acne-blighted adolescence. As a matter of fact, almost all the characters seem to be influenced by the sweet life shown in movies, magazines, and advertisements. Pimples loves cakes and pies. Mrs. Pritchard is known to her friends as a sweet woman. Horton sells toys, and even Van Brunt eats canned peaches and drinks sweet juice. But, beneath the sweetness, one can see disease, frustrations, lust, meanness, deceit, ugliness and death. The passengers speak of rules, formulae and clichés of health and morality, which are not found in them. Only Juan Chicoy seems to be able to look objectively at his desires and knows them for what they are. Even he cannot be said to be a convincing character. Looked at from various perspectives The Wayward Bus seems to be a critique of middle-class American life. For example, one has seen Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard pilloried without mercy. Steinbeck has built up the psychological and social realism with a dense texture. The impact of the ‘Age of Depression’ of the 30s, the economic crash and the human suffering led the novelist to waver between a limited critique of contemporary bourgeois society and a comprehensive critique of human condition.

Again, there seems to be a conflict between Steinbeck’s non-teleological thinking and the thinking of the teleological passengers. Only
Juan Chicoy seems to be a non-teleological character. Most of the characters are incorrigibly teleological, and the cry of "why" cannot be stifled. The confusion in this regard, built in the novel, will certainly intensify the reader's desire for a convincing evaluation, if not a metaphysical point of view, but at least a cleaner emotional resolution of the various elements presented in the novel's microscopic slice of life.
Notes


24 This brief information is based on Henry Thornton Moore’s *The Novel of John Steinbeck.* A First Critical Study- (Chicago: Normandy House, 1979) p.30.


44 John Steinbeck. *Ibid.* p. 188.
45 John Steinbeck. *Ibid.* p. 188.


