CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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Nineteenth century witnessed America as a new proud independent nation marching ahead with an unprecedented development and expansion in every sphere, financial, economical as well as in the sphere of communication. This advancement resulted in rise of democracy, which shifted the focus from the State or Society to the Individual. And in the not too distant future was to be won for the nation, a freedom for every individual irrespective of race or colour when Abraham Lincoln would give to the world the classic definition of democracy as, 'the government of the people, for the people and by the people.'

The land thus inherited from Columbus was transformed into a country characterized by a whole new way of life and thinking. Spontaneity of a moral being, individual drive for innovation, for freedom and daring for adventure and expansion were the traits distinguishing the American way of life.

A number of centres of art and learning developed across the nation during the period, to which flocked eminent men of letters. New York, Concord, Boston, Charleston are some of the centres of learning that gave America many writers of repute. During this initial period of literary development there arouse an inkling towards romanticism in American literature.

No other period in the history of American letters is as rich and as significant as the three decades that is from 1829-1860. This was the time of awakening and development, the time of emergence of truly national literature. The seeds of romanticism transplanted from Europe germinated with full vigour in a soil already well fertilized by the traditional puritan respect for the life of the mind, and eventually flowering into the so called New England Renaissance.
The period of the American Renaissance was distinguished by the literary achievements of such distinguished writers as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne and Melville. In fact Emerson’s was the first truly important voice in American letters. He was the first wholly American writer in the sense that he summed and expressed in his essays and poems, what was the logical basis of, American life and American political action from the landing at Plymouth Rock to the framing of the constitution. Regarded as the man thinking of the New England Renaissance, Emerson was the person who made the clarion call for the American intellectual independence in his famous essay *The American Scholar*.

The younger generation of writers like Thoreau and Whitman were greatly inspired by the writings of Emerson and were his ardent followers and admirers. Thoreau, a fellow transcendentalist of Emerson represented Emerson’s central message of self-reliance through his works. His ‘Walden’ is an excellent example of the writer’s experiment in simple living amidst nature, independent of any materialistic desires, chaos and confusion of urban life. Like him Whitman was also a writer deeply concerned with humanity and its troubles. A truly American poet, his poetry reflected the true picture of American people and life.

Another poet of considerable worth and repute belonging to the period, Emily Dickinson is one of the greatest woman poets of America. A writer of man and nature, her brief stanzas hold the distillation of all that means to be human.
A major development of American literature was in the genre of fiction, more specifically in the emergence of the American Novel. According to Mauriac, behind the most objective of novels, if it is truly a work of beauty and a great work, is concealed the lived drama of the novelist, his individual struggle with his demons and sphinx. But perhaps it is precisely the achievement of the genius that nothing of this personal drama is overtly betrayed in his work, thereby imparting a universality to the writer's literary endeavours.

The emergence of the American novel as a national literature in the hands of Fennimore Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain and Henry James needs no endorsement. These novelists evolved the American prose and put it to creative use in their novels. They were all such original and creative novelists that these novels show how a distinctively American Society developed. All of them confronted the problems peculiar to the American society with serious social consciousness and their works forged the tradition of great and truly American novels and tales. The American novels display an intelligent grip of characters wherein is portrayed the real and approachable characters, the naturalness of its surroundings and the distinctive trait of optimistic faith. Following Emerson’s dictum they portray realistically the life and spirit of America. Emerson called upon his countrymen to work upon themes that emanate from the American soil:

I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic.... I embrace the common: I sit at the feet of the familiar and the low.... Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and
wondrous than things remote.... The perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries.... The foolish man wonders at the unusual, but the wise man at the usual.... (Howells 79)

To say that the American fiction began with Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) has interesting implications for a student of American literature for the remarks comes from Hemingway, a novelist who wrote with a rare precision of feeling, something that has been seldom matched by later authors due, of course, to a variety of reasons. Through the adventures of a young lad, Twain introduced some of the main motives that clamour for possibilities in the heart and soul of American fiction - a subjective innocence planted amidst an objective world of experience, 'a negro too is a human being', the willful parent, the world of crime (the pirates on the trip), the dream of success and its failure leading to perversion (Huck's father), the surrogate fathers, swindlers, cheats (the Duke and the King), slave-hunters, the shift in ethical perception through the cultivation of what Saul Bellow was to call in his 1982 novel, 'the morality of seeing'. A mythopoeic creation, Huck Finn is primitive in his sense of morality that sees nothing wrong in humbling before a Negro, in his relation with nature-feels 'mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft'. When he finally decides to uphold the humanity of Jim, his negro companion, what we see in action is his primitive sense of things as also the flow of the personal into the transpersonal. The latter signals the entry into zones of wholeness. Thus human ethics replace social ethics. May be, that is a visionary stroke from this 19th century novelist. A whole range of Black fiction in the 20th
century was to explore areas where the great American failed its original natives as also those who were brought in as slaves and to whom the torch of liberty brought no relief.

Of the ten greatest American books, Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* are considered as an integral and prominent part of the list. The latter comes much closer to the novel and gives a more comprehensive and serious picture of the whole Mississippi frontier. The writer Howell envisions Mark Twain as the Lincoln of American literature.

One of the greatest of the American novelists, Nathaniel Hawthorne's greatness as an artist was recognized on the publication of his *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), first and second series. Sourcing his themes from the puritan past of Boston, Hawthorne tells the story of the early New England where pride, envy, remorse nag his characters, and where the unthinking community shuts out the individual crushing his spirit under the dead weight of repressive codes and orders. His tales according to Melville have a depth of tenderness, a boundless sympathy with all forms of being; they have in them an omnipresent love.

Herman Melville, another writer of promise and the famous writer of *Moby Dick* (1851) which as Leon Howard says is one of those rare works of literature that have a capacity for growth through some inner vitality which increases with time.

Some writers of the period deserving an equal mention are Henry James and Edith Wharton among others. As per Q. D. Leavis, one of the greatest of the
critics on fiction, the American novel grew up with Henry James and achieved a tradition with Edith Wharton.

Into this literary scenario of America, a fresh new literary impulse was provided by the cultural, social and political unrest of the mid-nineteenth century when the nation was besieged by the civil war of 1861-65. With the victory of Lincoln, a New America took shape emerging out of the shadows of the old one. The new nation grew into a continental nation with a gradual westward shift of population thus, giving birth to a more mixed and complex culture.

A corresponding expansion was also witnessed in the emergence of new educational and literary societies. People were eager to learn and widen their horizon of knowledge. Literature of this middle period fully reflected the emotional involvement of the American people, and a new American literature grew out of this political and emotional upheaval.

The American social, cultural and economic scene at the turn of the century is one of great complexity and diversity fully mirrored in the literature of the age. With the passing of time this complexity and intricacy continues to increase owing to a variety of reasons like rapid industrialization, urbanization, and also due to the influences and teachings of Freud, Jung, Bergson, Marx and others.

Further, the two world wars prove to be nerve shattering experiences for the Americans, and generate a loss of faith in traditional values resulting in frustration and pessimism. Life, values, every thing is proven temporal, and
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(A) TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA AND THE FICTION:

Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests.

- Emerson, The American Scholar

American literature may be said to have made its humble beginning in 1493 when Columbus wrote his famous letters to King Ferdinand of Spain. With the gradual expansion of settlements and colonies in America, American literature also underwent a gradual transformation from being the ward of European literature to constructing an identity independent of any such appendage.

The earliest American literature beginning with the letters written home by the explorers and adventurers further developed into the puritanical literature of the early settlers who were largely puritans. Their urge to write for the greatness and glory of God produced a voluminous literature mainly religious in nature. It was also because of their efforts that the first educational set-up was established, that is the Harvard College in 1636. and also the first printing press in 1639.
neither faith nor science can stand up to face the challenge and provide solace to the grieving and confused public.

Never before in the history of the republic had the idea of progress been so influential in American thought as in that period beginning in the early nineties and ending in 1917 which American historians have come to call the Progressive Era. The completion of the occupation of the continent, the overseas expansion following the defeat of Spain, the swift transformation, after Appomattox, of a civilization built on agriculture and commerce into an industrial culture, all combined in an American dream of a rosy-hued future. Underneath this dream was the conviction that advance in the natural and biological sciences would make possible the creation of a new world. (Spiller 947)

Twentieth century saw the American nation transforming from being largely agrarian to a nation wholly committed to industrialization and urbanization. Pessimism and frustration of the past is steadily replaced by an optimistic hope, and dreams of a coming golden age when justice, equality and fraternity for all would become the order of the day.

This general feeling of optimism generated a wave of new interest in literature, and there resulted a ‘poetic renaissance’. A number of poets came into prominence during the period like Robert Frost, Sandburg, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, etc. There emerged an ‘Imagist’ movement in poetry with Pound at its helm.
During the intervening period of the two wars, American literature also witnessed the rise of the American drama as evident in the works of such eminent dramatists as Eugene O’Neil, Elmer Rice, Sidney Howard, etc.

The novel also started showing signs of new vitality during the century. The outbreak of the Second World War had a profound effect on literature, and in the genre of novel. The idea of the hero is abandoned in favour of the neurotic and unheroic individual, struggling to find his bearings in the modern chaotic post war world. John Dos Passos, Hemingway, Saul Bellow, Faulkner are the successful novelists of the period representing the individual’s search for identity in a world of uncertainty and confusion.

According to E. S. Oliver:

American literature began in the seventeenth century in search for the ideal, a search lighted and directed by hope and expectation. This search has been persistently a part of the entire history of the literature growing out of the impact of European civilization upon the developing American frontier. This literature has never been removed from involvement in the human situation. It has indicated concern and compassion, even in its analysis and its evaluation. Intolerable injustice, social blindness, or brutalizing conditions, have been brought before the bar of public conscience by writers feeling a responsibility to brotherhood and the integrity of the self. Though some writers of the post-world war period have seemed to falter, the American literary tradition has held confidently to a
vision of man based on a conception of justice and the value and unlimited potential of the individual whose essential dignity is not betrayed. A trust in man is apparent in the social and political fabric of the America of the sixties and it is apparent in the literature of the new generation. In no other quality is this trust in man more apparent than in the depth of involvement and identity which is everywhere revealed. The American writer of this day is not aloof from the wishes, the visions and the frustrations of the human being looking for stars in a world where clouds form on the horizon. Thomas Wolfe was not out of key with the coming generation when he wrote near the end of his life, "The essence of all faith for people of my belief is man’s life can be, and will be better." This belief and to prevail whatever the obstacles or the foibles of the individual, is still central and fundamental in the literature of the United States." (Tilak 246-7)

American novel of the twentieth century owes a great deal to such early writers as John Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Steinbeck, to name just a few who began their careers in the 1920s and 1930s.

Dos Passos began his career with such novels as Three Soldiers (1921), Manhattan Transfer (1925), etc. His novels approached such massive subjects as World War I or World War II. His world of fiction is a world of palpable immediacy, attuned to the latest in materialism and communication, infused with an energetic assemblage of detail. For him the war was a corporate suffocation
of individual idealism. His disillusionment with the political situation of his
times lends a romantic streak to his works.

James T. Farrell is another prolific writer who took as his subject the
catholic working class and lower middle class of Chicago, essentially as it
existed in the twentieth century before World War II. His most notable works
include Young Lonigan (1932), The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan (1934),
etc.

E. S. Oliver says about Hemingway that he captured the imagination of a
generation of readers and writers in America more completely than has any other
literary figure of the twentieth century. Hemingway made himself into a legend
and his publication of a new novel an event. The Hemingway hero is fixture of
the times, his personality in all its splendour and mystery hovers over the
literature of the world even after his death.

Every writer is the product of the age in which he writes and Hemingway
is no exception in this respect. A Widespread breakdown of traditional standards
of conduct, which took place during and after World War I, and by which we are
still afflicted, affected American fiction, as well. It gave a new freedom,
especially in sexual matters, to established writers. There are a number of new
authors who must be regarded as special products of the age of ‘freedom’.

Among them one was Ernest Hemingway. Some of his famous novels are: The
Great Gatsby (1925), The Sun Also Rises (1926), A Farewell to Arms (1929),
etc.
The novels of William Faulkner give a glimpse of the history of America, the land and its people. His stories go back to the time when the Indians occupied Yoknapatawpha County and held slaves, and the first Compson came with a small, light-waisted, strong-hocked mare that could do two furlongs in under a half-minute, and won all the races from Ikkemotubbe's young braves until Ikkemotubbe swapped him a square mile of that land for the little mare.

The past is dramatized in situation after situation, in its full complication. It is a recognizable past, not a romanticized past, though we find many characters in Faulkner who are themselves romantics about the past like Quentin of The Sound and the Fury ((1929). The land, the people, and their history comes to us at a realistic level, at the level of recognition in Faulkner's novels. This realistic, recognizable world is one of the two South's about which Faulkner writes. Some of his other works are: As I Lay Dying (1930), Light in August (1932), etc.

It is impossible to say what Thomas Wolfe's position in American letters would have been had he lived to bring his work to completion. At the moment he stands very high in the estimation both of the critics and of the common reader. From the time of Look Homeward Angel (1929), he was regarded, and rightly, as a young man of incomparable promise. Of Time and the River (1935) seemed to have borne out that promise and, since its faults were taken as due merely to an excess of fecundity, it was met with praise as though it were the consummation of all Wolfe's talents.
Wolfe belonged to a world that is indeed living from moment to moment. And it is because they voice its breakdown in the consciousness of continuity that they have significance for it. And it wouldn’t be wrong to say that Wolfe was the one more aware of his plight. He was, he tells us, while writing *Of Time and the River*, tormented by a dream in which the sense of guilt was associated with the forgetting of time.

The works of major authors often have a unity that tempts the critic to look for a central theme, even a controlling symbol that focuses their vision of life. Robert Penn Warren used variations of a single theme in all his novels, symbolizing the polarities of violence and order. An expert novelist he could not have chosen two concepts more arresting to the modern reader or more deeply embedded in the history of his country and region. Uncovering the historical sources of American violence, he made them available for literary purpose in his novels like *Night Rider* (1939), *At Heaven’s Gate* (1943), etc. In his fiction violence predominates at the surface but a concept of order is always there as a touchstone.

The time when John Steinbeck began writing was the period of the Great Depression, a time when a large number of Americans were suffering from poverty, hunger and unemployment. It was the general feeling that they were trapped in an interminable labyrinth.

The thirties was decade of fear, misery and panic, of mass unemployment, the continuing defeat of democracy at the hands of
Fascism and Nazism, and of the threat of the universal war. (Allen 138)

John Steinbeck saw the fatal consequences that were brought about in society by the First World War and the Depression. He witnessed the deteriorating relations between man and man, and man and society, and resultantly focused his attention on the bitter and unhealthy individualism.

Steinbeck right from the beginning of his career as a novelist envisaged a world free from all kinds of exploitation and human misery. The Cup of Gold (1929), The Pastures of Heaven (1932), and A God Unknown (1933), the novels published before Tortilla Flat (1935) envisions a world where freedom is possible for all. In reality however, social ethics was taking a beating throughout the 20th century in trying to reach out to human ethics in the American life and society.

Nevertheless, in America was growing up a generation consciously in transit from an old to a new America, moving from small town to big city, from old 'puritan' containments to new liberation.

The racial question, the growing contradictions in material prosperity, the post-atom apprehension of responsibility, the fall-out of democratization of the aristocratic culture or the rapidly changing social scenario, the very aesthetics of living, recording all this the novelist faced the hard fact of the American moral crisis.

Acclaimed as the greatest novelist since Faulkner, Saul Bellow was a writer closely associated with the American reality, which led to a comedy of
suffering jokers, to the representation of a human condition that is comic, pathetic, cruel, depending on the point of view, and to the assertion of a religious affirmation for the very fact of a living human being. The 1944 hero of Bellow from *Ms. Sammler’s Planet* (1970) represented this reality and his quest to know ‘what we are and what we are for’. This process of cognition is conceived in the Bellovian fiction through tales of voyage, adventures, encounters and the complexities of relationships.

The reality of the century, the reality of the wars drew attention to the splits and conflicts in the American society, striking the human soul with new terrors and brutality. The aesthetics of living looked for ways to hide the abject nakedness of the situation. The novelists depicted this utter chaos and confusion in their narratives, like in the character of the decapacitated hero of Hemingway. Jake Barnes says in *The Sun Also Rises*, “All I wanted to know was how to live in it” (Hemingway 124). In symbolic terms, he is a living victim of the holocaust of war. In this reality of abject nakedness and brutality, the ideal may be rather exacting and stretch the human ability to a point of self-destruction. But the real challenge, the ideal is to embody grace under pressure, dignity in disaster, or sheer perseverance in the pursuit of an ideal. It is a quest to attain wholeness, a prominent theme that underlines all American fiction of the 20th century. And so we see the Joad family struggle in an odyssey of endurance in Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) led by the instinct to survive, striving for ultimate possibilities and infinite hopes.

(B) SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL MILIEU:
Most of the literary works of John Steinbeck can be observed as a reflection of contemporary events. It therefore becomes essential that his social milieu: all the political, social, religious, cultural and economic events are taken into account. The twentieth century has the peculiarity of taking nothing for granted; it questions every thing.

From the days of exploration, America has witnessed many upheavals apart from the revolution, settlements, expansion and industrial setups. The dawn of twentieth century has been said to be have stepped in the progressive era, yet it was not untouched with different kinds of abnormalities. During the two decades between 1910 and 1930, the urban population of the nation rose from forty-six percent to fifty-six percent and attitudes also changed heralding an age of modern thought and practices, in morals and manners. The material progress was a profoundly democratizing force from a social point of view. Although the rich got richer fast, it was the increased wealth of the working classes that resulted in the much more alterations in the character of society.

American workers, whose real wages had remained almost unchanged during the progressive era, saw their purchasing power rise rapidly in the twenties while their work-week tended to decline. Still differences in wealth were not so clearly distinguishable. Even the average man could have his own car, although he could not afford the custom-made possessions of the rich man.

Under such seemingly peace time conditions, the United States had gradually slipped into a severe economic depression. A brief Bankers Panic of 1907 did not unseat the economy for long, but in 1914, signs pointed to severe
depression. The nation was rescued on that occasion by World War I and it recovered quickly, except for certain classification of farmers and some other smaller economic groups, from the recession of 1921. Then in 1929 it suffered a depression deeper and more enduring than any it had yet experienced. Brought out of the Great Depression by World War II, the nation in 1949 drifted again into depression. The reason behind it had been reckless land speculation and heavy expenditure on internal improvements, especially on railroads. Irresponsible banking practices followed by bank failures had also been a part of the pattern. Apart from this, European business panics had also weakened the American economy periodically.

To overcome these depressions, the belief was held both by the American business community and the American politicians that America had at last discovered the secret of perpetual prosperity. Through the Federal Reserve System they tried to solve the perennial problem of maintaining a national credit.

The New York Stock Exchange, the most spectacular barometer of the nation’s material progress by the late twenties, soared to new heights during elections. Enormous quick profits were made possible in stock speculation by buying on the margin. But the crash descended very soon. Within days, the market values of stocks had dropped by one-third, and thereafter, it was not found possible to check their downward course for the next three years. Millions of investors had been ruined. The distrust of the business community and of the economic system had settled in. This wild rise and fall of the market did much to initiate the Great Depression, and lengthen it further.
Depressions, however, had been viewed by the government as deviations from the normal conditions of prosperity, rooted in temporary malfunctioning of the law of supply and demand. They planned to benefit directly those people who suffered most from the Depression. For this, a program supported by the government was launched under which the farm cooperatives were decided to grant loans. It was also decided to finance them for the purchase of surpluses of wheat and cotton. A second solution to the farm problem was put forward in the form of tariff protection. But unfortunately, it proved no more effective for farmers who were producing for the world market. Certainly, the American people had witnessed the most traumatic experiences in the Great Depression of the 1930s. The severe victims of this economic nightmare were no doubt, farmers. The tenant farmer with a mule was displaced by mechanized factory farming. Yet some other farmers of Oklahoma were displaced for being defaulters in loan repayments. Years of cotton farming sapped the soil of its vitality, resulting in diminished crop yield. As such the farmers were forced to borrow money from the banks. But ruined by the Dust Bowl and subsequent crop failures, banks foreclosed their mortgages and drove them off their land.

Eventually this unemployment and migration of farmers drove one third of the nation's working force onto the streets. Though most of the migrants were summoned by the affluent landowners of California valley, still their starvation was not checked totally. The great agricultural owners of California sought to attract and exploit them as a body of cheap labour. Owners did not let ethics interfere with their recruiting methods. The migrants of Oklahoma called as
'Okies' were easy prey to such recruiting methods in the green valleys of California. Furthermore, the owners bid them against their hunger as they were more concerned with maintaining a certain level of profit than in feeding the hungry people. Despite their awareness of economic injustice, the Okies dared not raise their voice against organized monopolistic land owners.

American Government also was keen to maintain the budget during depression as it had during times of prosperity. It initiated the first New Deal for the labour problem. Several other measures were also commenced in order to improve the banking crisis which was paralyzing the economy. Another New Deal in 1934 was endorsed with the hope for recovery from the Depression. But it was opposed angrily by most of the groups: the Marxists, the Socialists and the Communist Party. The most telling criticism of the New Deal was that it had failed in the main task of lifting the nation out of Depression. But then, the very toll of the World War II really lifted the Depression. The number of unemployed dropped drastically. In addition to this the democratic administration well succeeded in maintaining and strengthening the most challenging conditions of the nation that hard time.

Quite obviously the first half of the twentieth century in America is remembered sharply for contours of the depression. There was an atmosphere of crisis of unemployment and starvation. At the same time it was also a period of relief and reform, voicing of the New Deal. It was a society so vague that it assigned more significance to the protection of property before the preservation of human values. At the same time it implied that if men could only be brought
to understand them, they would not only survive but also triumph. And they did triumph.

It is relevant here to turn to certain aspects of American thought and character between 1900 to the 1950s as John Steinbeck belongs to this phase. Also it is very difficult to interpret aspects such as art, education, criticism, psychology, anthropology, business, science, technology and a dozen other manifestations of American culture at length. Therefore only a few aspects have been considered here.

Creation of American character and American philosophy took a period of more than two and a half centuries. As Henry Steele Commager in the American Mind has observed:

The American character was the product of interplay of inheritance and environment, both varied and complex. For the inheritance was not only British but European, not only of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries but of two thousand years; that the roots of her culture and her institutions traced back to Greece and Rome and Palestine was not to be forgotten. [The American Mind 1950, 177]

The twenties were a decade of crashing triumph in American cultural history. The industrial revolution introduced the new intellectual experience of a fundamental material progress. This material progress in turn raised great cities and spanned the nation with railroads. However this material change also precipitated a comparable change in the intellectual outlook and national
character. In this sixty years period, America changed from rural to urban, but it was not yet an urbane civilization. Though the Americans had conquered leisure for themselves on a scale, yet men seemed very hurried. Mass immigration, invention and technology had changed an economy of abundance yet the era witnessed the greatest and most prolonged depression. Thus material changes in fact were convulsive and at times had paradoxical consequences.

In the philosophical realm America witnessed a transition from certainty to uncertainty, from faith to doubt, from security to insecurity. The temper was not always of scientific thought but religious too. Easier communication, urbanization and the mobility of population along with press, radio and motion pictures also affected character and habit. The culture that was gradually developing was democratic and vulgar at the same time. Most Americans considered themselves as mature in the realm of arts and letters and stressed more on self expression. Culturally it was that America which had its European inheritance had matured with the passage of time.

Still to trace out the forces that created a change in national and individual character is not a very easy task. The American was still optimistic as before and his culture was still predominantly material as it was in the past. He still boasted his own idiom and his own brand of humour. However he had developed his own art and literature and claimed a native music. In literature, American writers wrote their independence of Europe, of their Puritan American past and their philistine American present. Finally a climax of world recognition came in 1930 when the novelist Sinclair Lewis became the first American to win the Nobel
Prize for literature. This recognition gradually wiped away the vulgarity of the American market place and led to creative writings that are unrivalled for excellence and diversity by any other decade in American history.

Apart from ideas and habitual modifications, changes in moral attitudes and practices of Americans in the twentieth century are significant. The most striking change was in the realm of religion. Americans were still formally Christians and increasing numbers of them saw it fit to maintain a formal connection with some church. The waning influence of religion could be traced even in literature. The new generation was not as familiar with the Bible as the preceding generation had been. Though religious books were printed in abundance still it was limited only to the theologians, whereas the lay man was familiar neither with theology nor with religious history. Lawlessness and American politics proved that morality had a loose grip on twentieth century.

Despite all, success was the ultimate test and justification of everything. Even Emerson affirmed the fact when he said that there is only one acceptable test of national genius and that was success.

This statement of Emerson cannot be ignored. Indeed the Americans had been largely successful in what they undertook. They had at least in large measure, a more perfect union, established justice, insured domestic tranquility and secured blessings of liberty for themselves to safeguard their posterity. They had lifted the burden from the shoulders of men, given to immigrants a second chance, cherished the principles and promoted the practices of freedom. Besides, material well-being was also promoted, social equality was encouraged and a
favourable climate was provided for the nourishment of talent. Thus it was in
every way, a spectacular achievement and one with few parallels in history. It is
indeed very difficult to emerge as a distinctive character out of an amalgam of
inheritance, environment and historical experience. But America succeeded in
preserving and developing that character even in a changed environment. The
American character not withstanding its relative maturity was still in process of
development and the future promised to be no less interesting, setting a hope for
the human race.

(C) EMERGENCE OF JOHN STEINBECK AS A NOVELIST:

The Swedish Academy declared in awarding the Nobel Prize for
Literature in 1962 to John Steinbeck that he had no mind to be an unoffending
comforter and entertainer, instead, the topics he chose were serious and
denunciatory. But they were also deeply rooted in human experience.

Steinbeck’s literary career spanned four decades. His works included
novels, short stories, plays, film scripts and a lot of non-fiction. Considered the
foremost novelist of the American Depression of the 1930s, Steinbeck was the
1962 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He studied firsthand the struggles
of the migrant workers; he celebrates their labor in ritualistic terms and shows
the downtrodden overcoming their many adversities through courage and
dignity, and through their compassion for fellow sufferers.

.... He sought the company of the rough, poorly educated, often
brutalized and despised men, the hewers of wood and drawers of
water, who furnish the unskilled labor upon which our civilization
and society, depend. (Cleland 311)

His prose is considered lyrical in its ability to capture the native speech,
folktales and humour of a particular region.

John Ernst Steinbeck was born in 1902 in a small forming town of Salinas
Valley, California on 27th February. He was of German and Irish descent.
Johann Adolf Großsteinbeck (Grosssteinbeck), Steinbeck's grandfather, had
shortened the family name from Großsteinbeck to Steinbeck when he migrated
to the United States.

The third of four children, John was the only boy. His family was a close,
middle class unit living in a small community. Steinbeck's native region of
Monterey Bay in the Salinas Valley was later to become the setting of most of
his fiction. The child of Monterey country treasurer, John Steinbeck Sr. and a
former school teacher, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck. Steinbeck learned to love
books from his mother.

From an early childhood, Steinbeck and his siblings were exposed to a
wide variety of novels and literature at home. "Some literature was in the air
around me. The Bible I absorbed through my skin. My uncles exuded
Shakespeare, and Pilgrim’s Progress was mixed with my mother’s milk."
(Steinbeck Introduction 11). At the age of nine, Steinbeck received a copy of
Malory’s Morte d’ Arthur which proved to be one of the biggest influences in his
literary career. Among his other early favourites were Dostoevsky’s Crime and
Punishment and Milton’s Paradise Lost.
Steinbeck lived in a small rural town that was essentially a rough-and-tumble frontier place, set amid some of the world’s most fertile land. As a child, Steinbeck attended the local high school and worked on farms and ranches during his summer vacations, and later with migrants on the huge Spreckels ranch.

In 1919, Steinbeck graduated from Salinas High School and attended Stanford University intermittently until 1925, financing his education by doing odd jobs and sometimes dropped out of college for whole quarters. Between 1920 and 1926, he studied marine Biology at Stanford University, eventually leaving without a degree. He traveled to New York City and did odd jobs while pursuing his dream of becoming a writer. When he failed to get his work published, he returned to California and worked as a handyman at Lake Tahoe.

His interest in writing and reading literature developed at a young age. He was the associate editor of his high school’s newspaper, *El Gabilan*. He also wrote many articles and short stories for the newspaper, where his talent was recognized by many of his teachers. He continued his career in college by writing articles which appeared in *The Stanford Spectator*. Several of his early poems and short-stories appeared in university publications.

After spending a short time as a labourer in mills and a ranch hand, Steinbeck also worked as a reporter in New York City for *The American*, before returning to California. He used many of his experiences as material for his later novels. He continued writing throughout his dabbles in ordinary labour jobs, as an apprentice hood-career, apprentice painter, caretaker of an estate, surveyor
and fruit-picker. In 1927, he had his first professionally published article in *The Smoker's Companion*, under the pseudonym John Stern. While working as a watchman of a house in the High Sierra, Steinbeck wrote his first book, *Cup of Gold* (1929). The book did not prove to be a financial success and Steinbeck failed to pay back the $2.50 that the publisher had given him in advance.

In 1930, Steinbeck married Carol Henning. His father gave him a house in the Pacific Grove and a monthly allowance of 25 dollars. It was in Pacific Grove in the early 1930s that Steinbeck met Edward Ricketts, a marine biologist whose views on the interdependence of all life deeply influenced Steinbeck's thinking. They formed a close and strong friendship. His association with Ed stimulated his interest in biology and Ed became the model for some important characters in his novels. *Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *The Long Valley* (1930) were short story collections, in which the Salinas Valley played a similar mythical role. In the novel *To a God Unknown* (1933), Steinbeck mingled Rickett's ideas with Jungian concepts and themes, which had been made familiar by the mythologist Joseph Campbell.

The early novels of Steinbeck went unnoticed but his humorous tale of pleasure loving Mexican-Americans, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), brought him wider recognition. His financial situation improved significantly and he was now paid thousands of dollars for the film rights to the book.

*In Dubious Battle* (1936), a strike novel set in the California apple country, Steinbeck depicted life and struggle of the migratory workers. One of the characters of the novel, Doc Burton, a detached observer was partly derived
from the personality of his friend Ricketts. Later Steinbeck developed his observer’s personality with changes in his later works. In 1937, Steinbeck published *Of Mice and Men*, one of three novels which Steinbeck referred to as a ‘play-novelette’. A story of shattered dreams, the novel became Steinbeck’s first big success. He later adapted the novel into a three act play which was produced in 1937. Another book belonging to this period from 1936-1936 is *The Red Pony*, considered by many as a children’s book.

Steinbeck’s epic novel and the winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in 1939. The novel, the title of which originated from Zulia Ward Howe’s *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* (1861) was a work largely condemned for the writer’s portrayal of farmers and businesses. Sourcing material for the book, Steinbeck had travelled around California migrant camps in 1936. Later when the author won the Coveted Nobel prize for literature, the Swedish Academy referred to it as ‘an epic chronicle’.

A restless Soul, Steinbeck travelled the world to appease his restlessness. The publication of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* was followed by a period of travel, film making and journalism. He used his travels as a basis for many of his novels and wrote many non fictional journals. In 1940, Steinbeck went on a voyage around the Gulf of California with his friend Ed Ricketts, collecting biological specimens. In 1941, he published *Sea of Cortez*, which records his six-week expedition in the Gulf of California with Ricketts. In 1947 appeared his two novels *The Pearl* and *The Wayward Bus*. 
Steinbeck’s twelve years marriage to Carol Henning had ended in 1942. Next year he married the singer Gwyndolyn Conger, with whom he had two sons, Thomas and John. However, the marriage was an unhappy one and they divorced in 1949.

During World War II, Steinbeck served as a war correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune in Great Britain and the Mediterranean area. He wrote such government propaganda as the novel The Moon is Down (1942), about resistance movement in a small town occupied by the Nazis.

Steinbeck had visited Europe in 1937 after gaining success with Of Mice and Men, and met on a Swedish ship two Norwegians, with whom he had celebrated Norway’s Independence Day. In 1943 Steinbeck moved to New York City, his home for the rest of his life, while his summers the author spent at Sag Harbour. He also traveled much in Europe.

In 1945 was published, Cannery Row, which returned to the world of Tortilla Flat. The novel was an account of the adventures and misadventures of workers in a California Cannery and their friends. Its sequel, Sweet Thursday appeared much later in 1954.

In 1948, with the death of his friend Ed Ricketts and the divorce from his second wife, Gwyn, Steinbeck’s life was essentially turned upside down. Fortunately however, he met his third wife Elaine Scott in 1949. Elaine, an attractive, witty southerner from Texas, was the perfect companion for John, who was generally shy and less open. During his marriage to Elaine, Steinbeck wrote some of his most remarkable works. In 1950 appeared Burning Bright.
which deals with Joe Saul's expanding consciousness as he accepts his sterility and affirms the holiness of all life. In 1951 was published The Log from the Sea of Cortez containing introduction and narrative from Sea of Cortez and a biography of Ed Ricketts. It was during this period that he worked on the story and script of Viva Zapata! (1952). In 1952, East of Eden his longest and most ambitious novel was published. Sweet Thursday (1954), the sequel to Cannery Row met with much criticism but was surely a work having a definite moral purpose. In 1957 appeared A Fabrication: The Short Reign of Pippin IV, which proved without a doubt Steinbeck's versatility as a writer. In 1960 Steinbeck went on a three-month trip round U.S.A. and in 1961 was published his last novel The Winter of Our Discontent, wherein he represents evil dominating all sections of society. Travelling on a ten-month journey, about 10,000-mile through America with his poodle Charley, Steinbeck writes his amusing and reflective Travels with Charley published in 1962.

In his later works Steinbeck turns from the objective, Scientific, non-judgmental viewpoint to a more personal, social and moralistic perspective. But the one quality that has characterized his writing from the beginning to the end of his career has been Steinbeck's search for truth, compassion for people, and appreciation of natural beauty. A very modest human being. Steinbeck almost always wrote about other people. His caring about other people, his modesty and his ability to make fun of himself endeared him to the people, probably more than any author of his time.
In 1962 Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, accepting which he defined the role of a writer thus:

The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exploring our many grievous faults and failure, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement.

Furthermore he asserts:

...the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat— for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally-flags of hope and of emulation. (Steinbeck “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech” 691)

After John Steinbeck was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature, the New York Times asked in an editorial, whether the prize committee might not have made a better choice. Steinbeck took this public humiliation hard. In later years he did much special reporting abroad, dividing his time between New York and California.

Although he has been unpopular with many American literary critics many of whom thought the award should have been given to another writer, the four decades since the award have shown that Steinbeck truly deserved this honour. As Luchen Li writes in his just published book, John Steinbeck: A Documentary Volume that, John Steinbeck was one of the most accomplished and widely read authors of the twentieth century. Today his books continue to
sell millions of copies every year, both in and outside the United States. His themes cover a broad range of issues: social, political, cultural, moral, global and environmental. Contrary to the prediction of many influential critics that his popularity would decline after his death Steinbeck's reputation as a major American novelist has survived intact and is growing ever more.

For a while, Steinbeck served as an advisory to President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose Vietnam policies he agreed with. At Camp the President asked Steinbeck to go to Vietnam to report on the war. Steinbeck wrote for the newspaper *Newsday* a series of articles, which divided his readers. *The New York Post* attacked him for betraying his liberal past.

In personal life Steinbeck was suffering from ill-health since 1961 when he had his first heart attack. There was however no shortage of awards and accolades that gave due recognition to him for his talents. In September 1964, Steinbeck was awarded the United States Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1967, at the behest of *Newsday* magazine, Steinbeck went to Vietnam to report on the war there. In 1967 Steinbeck also had to undergo a back operation. And on December 20, 1968 he died of heart attack in New York.

In his life time Steinbeck wrote thousands of letters, sometimes several, a day. To Pascal Covici, his friend, he confessed that he wanted to write the work to his sons, the story of good and evil, love and hate to demonstrate to them how they are inseparable. Steinbeck recorded his writing process minutely in *Journal of A Novel* posthumously published in 1969. After Steinbeck's death, his

In *The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights*, Steinbeck turned his back on contemporary subjects and brought to life the Arthurian world with its ancient codes of honour. Steinbeck had started the work with enthusiasm but never finished it. In fact Steinbeck had spent nearly a year at Discove Cottage in England, working with *Morte d'Arthur*, the first book he had read as a child, his first and most profound literary influence.

On Feb. 27, 1979, on what would have been his 77th birthday, Steinbeck was honoured by being placed on a U.S. postage stamp. Recently on December 5, 2007 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver inducted Steinbeck into the California Hall of Fame, located at The California Museum for History, Women and the Arts. His son, author Thomas Steinbeck, accepted the award on his behalf.

Judging by his intended audience, Steinbeck stands as one of the great writers in all of American literature, representing America in a significant way to the rest of the world. What made him different from most other novelists of the mid-twentieth century was his constant curiosity, which in turn led him to have an extraordinary breadth of knowledge about science, history, geography, and language. He showed both in his fiction and in his journalism, in their variety and depth of understanding, that he was interested in nearly everything. In reading the new collection of his journalism and essays, it might seem as if he is still alive today, dealing with today's concerns, writing about the environment.
about America’s moral decline, about war, racism, violence, ethnicity, and greed.

Like the poet Robert Frost, Steinbeck was so essentially American that we feel at home with him, connected to him, and that he is speaking to us in our language.

The acceptance of Steinbeck, indeed the love for him, was almost universal. People just felt at home with the man they assumed was behind the books that they had read. Once when he was in Paris on his way to the Soviet Union with the photographer Robert Capa in 1947, a farmer in the provinces came determined to see him. Hearing of Steinbeck’s presence in the city he had travelled on the train all night and persevered long enough to make the manager of the hotel relent to his wish and let him see the writer. Despite the fact that Steinbeck did not speak French, the author and the farmer had a meaningful meeting, presumable through sign language.

As a writer, Steinbeck’s writing is difficult to be characterized and put, into a definite slot. Steinbeck’s writing like himself was modest never calling attention to itself, it was a reflection of his personality, his humour, his curiosity, his self-deprecation and his attention to small details and ordinary people.

His prose is so well crafted, often so poetic, and at the same time so clear, that we might think that it was produced effortlessly. But that is not the case. He worked hard, and with some anxiety, on every piece, no matter how short or how small the potential audience. Steinbeck’s best work is comparable in quality and moral significance to that of any of his contemporary writers. As current biases
pass away and new scholars point out the strengths of the author for future readers, John Steinbeck's place within American literature remains secure.

(D) THEMATIC CONCERNS OF JOHN STEINBECK:

Tracing the development of Steinbeck's career as novelist, it can be seen that his art has emerged more mature and realistic with a progress in time, which later turned into a personal one. Two words that most accurately define Steinbeck's fiction are compassion and understanding. His compassion was:

... The sharing of a sorrow, a pity and sympathy, a desire to help feeling another's pain or plight as if it were one's own, seeing 'those in chains as bound with them' (Fuller 34)

Steinbeck's fiction during the 1930's reveals a preoccupation with the themes of innocence and experience. Innocence is a sort of a childhood from which there is a growth to maturity, which is experience. In his first novel The Cup of Gold (1929), Steinbeck depicts a queen type of brotherhood. The buccaneers form a group and it is through group action that they are able to conquer Panama, supposed to be the cup of gold. Along with this novel, Steinbeck's The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown and The Grapes of Wrath, comprise the novel of innocence, envisioning a world of freedom and immense joy. But life is not like this. Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle is the novel of experience. The goal of course is freedom but the main problem is 'emancipation'.

Steinbeck's next novel The Pastures of Heaven (1932) depicts the locale of a California valley around the time 1925. The story is about the lives of
individuals whose common factor is their living, more than is usual, in worlds of their own imagination or fear. These people are forced by various circumstances to recognize and to confirm to the larger, stronger and hostile pressures of a society that represents the real world.

To a God Unknown (1933), is a history of the agricultural settlement of California, from the point of view of the novel’s hero, Joseph Wayne, a quasi believer in animism, and a priest or God of fertility in nature.

Steinbeck’s writings often present ethnic characters whose identity is in crisis because of the conflict of cultures. In their effort to retain the pastoral world and its values they are tragically doomed. It was Steinbeck’s sympathetic depiction of such ethnic characters like the raffish Paisanos of Tortilla Flat (1935), a ramshackle district above Monterey that first won him popular attention. The Flat’s tender hearted, resourceful, mildly corrupt, ever-optimistic characters are a triumph of life-affirming humour. The book won the Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal and was cited as the ‘Year’s Best by a Californian’.

Steinbeck’s own experience as a worker and his close affinity with their problems and struggles find a frequent expression in his various works.

His close association with the workers, the worst sufferers of economic injustice, made him look for a land where freedom for all could be possible. For this, he took the support of the socialist theories and rejected the bourgeois liberalism of the nineteenth century. (Sinha 142)
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Steinbeck learnt Marxism as a worker. In one of his letters he wrote, “My information for this book [In Dubious Battle] came mostly from Irish and Italian communists whose training was in the field, not in the drawing room.” (Lisca 27). In Dubious Battle (1936), is the story of the struggle between two groups, the exploited and the exploiters. The workers, living in abject poverty, face the land owners who always look for an opportunity to reduce the wages and increase the working hours. The story of the novel plunges into the political struggle of the 1930’s, painting a vigorous fresco of a migrant fruit-picker’s strike. The novel won for the author the best Californian Novel of 1930.

Of Mice and Men (1937) is probably the only one of Steinbeck’s works which is satisfying as a whole, and it is a short novel or novella. With this novel Steinbeck secured his status as one of the most influential American writers. Lennie and George, itinerant farmhands held together in the face of deprivation only by the frailest of dreams, have long since passed into American mythology. Referred to by Steinbeck as ‘such a simple little thing’, the novel later came to be recognized as a masterpiece of concentrated emotional power.

Written in an incredibly compressed five-month period, Steinbeck’s acknowledged masterpiece The Grapes of Wrath had an electrifying impact upon publication in 1939, unleashing a political storm with its vision of American’s dispossessed struggling for survival. It continues to exert a powerful influence on American culture, and has inspired various artists. Tracing the journey of the Joad family from the dust bowl of Oklahoma to the migrant camps of California, Steinbeck creates an American epic, spacious, impassioned, and pulsating with
the rhythms of living speech. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize and has since
sold millions of copies worldwide. Coming at the end of the Great Depression
The Grapes of Wrath gathers up all the dreams of success of a paradise on Earth,
of a new settlement, of a place of one’s own, into an epic utterance. These
dreams are however shattered by cruel fate on the one hand and man’s
inhumanity to man on the other. Further this novel strikes a note of hope at the
end, despite the great human sorrow it dramatizes. Based on the practical
working experience of the novelist, the work portrays his dedication to the cause
of the workers and destitutes, and their emancipation from the quagmire of the
capitalist system. The novelist believed in giving humanity a free rein. Man
wants to work, to think, to create and live happily. This is humanity. If humanity
is suppressed human beings will certainly unify to dethrone the oppressor. And
this happens in The Grapes of Wrath.

In fact the two novels, In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath
champion the cause of humanity in this troubled world. Both were written during
the period of the Great Depression when the rich people, numbering a few, had
become vile and exploited the people of their own country in impossible ways.
Steinbeck analysed the situation and searched for a philosophy and method for
the emancipation of the down-trodden people so that they could breathe the air
of freedom.

The Moon is Down (1942) is a novel written not to take sides either with
the Nazis or the Allies. It is the story of a little town that has been invaded. It has
no generalities, no ideas. In fact it is a means for the novelist to study the
psychological and social implications of the war. It transcends a particular scene, nationality, time and place; it becomes a purely detached survey, a document of the unmapped human psyche.

_Cannery Row_ (1945) takes the reader to a world in which human life goes on a very modernistic pattern. The activities of aimless, wandering youth are depicted vividly in the novel. Steinbeck wrote the book to show the sickness and disease eating into the vitals of human society even without the onslaught of violent and destructive war. Mack and the boys, Lee Chong, Dora, Mr. and Mrs. Mallory and others, all constitute independent though inter-dependent units of Cannery society.

_The Pearl_ (1947) is a work of consummate art and has a specific thematic structure. On the surface it is a simple story of a man, Kino and a ‘Pearl’ that he finds. But it has the implication, the amplitude and the strength of a parable of purgation and salvation. In fact the story symbolically becomes the story of the human soul falling from its state of innocence to experience and passing through the crucible of sufferings and rising to the state of redemption.

_The Wayward Bus_ (1947) is Steinbeck’s first major novel to follow _The Grapes of Wrath_. The novel has a considerable amount of allegorical detail which is difficult to reconcile with an objective record of what ‘is’. The destination happens to be the name of a mystic poet. The bus’s original name, ‘El Gran Poder de Jesus’ (The Great Power of Jesus), is just visible under the name ‘Sweet-Heart’, which is boldly lettered on the front and the rear bumpers of the bus. The basis is allegorical, both a means of transport and a world.
Steinbeck's novel *Burning Bright* (1950) was written in the form of a play-novelette. The novel deals with the four principal characters – Joe Saul, Mordeen, Friend Ed and Victor. The theme of 'sterility' has been treated purely in terms of sex, morality and the laws of procreation in the book. In many of his earlier novels Steinbeck has dealt with the basic human condition of stagnation and progression, unfulfillment and fulfillment of human desires. In the book, it culminates in Joe's movement from a narrow cell of egoism to the expansion of a universal understanding.

Steinbeck's longer and thicker writings have culminated in *East of Eden* (1952), professedly his most ambitious novel that according to him has nearly everything he has in it. The title referring to the fallen world is a long family novel set in rural California in the years around the turn of the century. In the novel, Steinbeck makes many definite pronouncements in favour of the individual's 'freedom of the mind'. His object of compassion now is man with his personal and private sorrows. In *East of Eden* for the first time Steinbeck examines the question of good and evil, and the extent to which the individual is responsible for his actions. In part IV of the novel, he devotes to the expounding of the eternal aspect of the war between good and evil:

I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one....humans are caught in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too--in a net of good and evil. (EOE 359)
Sweet Thursday (1954) had its origin as the scenario for a comedy. The materials are drawn consciously from Cannery Row, but the passing of time and the format of musical comedy work a considerable change on the original materials. The central action of the plot concerns Doc’s forced return to the good life through love.

The Short Reign of Pippin IV (1957) retells the consequences of restoration of monarchy in France. It refers to mankind at large, but the basic idea is a fantasy that invites a possibility rather than a fact. Fairyland becomes the fact of the political chaos of the Forth Republic - an exaggerated mirror of fantasy which men are capable of inventing and extends into the virtues of Kingship. In this novel, Steinbeck has written from that point of vantage where one can smile at and even laugh at the so-called serious emissaries of the state.

The Winter of Our Discontent (1961) Steinbeck’s last novel is the fruit of his journey in search of America as recounted in the Travels with Charley. The story of the novel is a continuation of the timeless theme of man’s Fall and his working out of his redemption. It portrays the life of a common man, his family and their ‘Eden’, which is essentially in a fallen state. It is a kind of wasteland peopled by selfish and worldly men and women.

In his longer novels To a God Unknown (1933), In Dubious Battle (1936), The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and East of Eden (1952), there are electrifying passages, sudden and tragically short-lived moments of vision, little spurts of verbal energy and momentary manifestations of the author. In these works there is the occasional character who lights up for us the adventure he is
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engaged in, normally not the hero, Joseph Wayne or Tom Joad or Jim Nolan or Adam Trask, but the Steinbeck sage, the renegade doctor or renegade minister or renegade philosopher, whose puzzled involvement with the action helps to give the action such force and meaning as it may possess.

Through these swift moments of light and these infrequent bearers of light, the effective presence and the design of the realities, motifs and images can be dimly detected in these novels. There are two kinds of motif in the fiction of John Steinbeck. The first may be called the American motif; a celebrational sense of life, a sense of promise and possibility and of as yet unspoiled novelty in man and his habitation, a mystical sympathy both for the individual and for what Whitman called the ‘en-masse’. In short, a vision, if that is not too rarefied and romantic a word for it, which was of New England and the American east in its nineteenth century origins and which Steinbeck has very properly naturalized in his native California and translated into its idiom.

The second is the contemporary motif; something so close in sustenance to the American motif that it can be seen as growing organically out of it, and yet which also appears as a dominant motif in the fiction of other contemporary languages and countries.

This motif springs from the tragic awareness, which in Steinbeck’s case is some times only an intensely pathetic awareness, of the fateful division between man and man; and of that division as a central feature of the mutilated life that is the novelist’s business to give a direct impression of.
The sense of division leads naturally to the political theme. It leads to the intuition that the form which the human struggle currently assumes, the representative plot of contemporary experience and the soul of its tragedy, is political in design. The political theme consists of a revolt against the forces that keep men separated, and its heart tends to beat to the formula of Albert Camus that asserts, 'I rebel, therefore I am'.

Steinbeck has made his contribution to the theme and its heart-beat, especially in The Grapes of Wrath. But the relation between the elements, the felt division, the rebellion, and the ordering power of art is extremely complex. It is partly Steinbeck's habit of over simplifying both life and art that has kept him from seeing and taking hold of the complex entirety. The elements rarely fuse in his fiction; they tend rather to jar against each other. The same may be said of the two leading motifs.

The evolution of the contemporary motif from the American motif may be seen within the development of American literature itself, in the movement from Thoreau and Emerson to Hawthorne and from all of them to Henry James; a movement from the happy evocation of 'the simple separate person' and the sturdy conviction that the world was, or could be seen as young and uncorrupted, to the gradual sense of self-isolation, of darkness and bewilderment. And thence to the ensuing perception that the form of human experience was exactly the strenuous. perhaps desperate need and effort of separated individuals to draw close to one another, to enjoy an experience of life by means of a human
relationship, in what Henry James was to call 'the great greasy sea' of the anarchic modern world.

There is no such coherent and meaningful evolution in Steinbeck's work, though he began reasonably enough in the recognizably American vein and has gone on to identify, and respond boldly to, the contemporary challenge. The motifs have not so much met together as collided, in a struggle, as it were, between poetry and politics. For Steinbeck's poetry, the truly creative side of him, has remained American while his engrossing theme has become contemporary and political.

In the work of the early thirties - The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown, and Tortilla Flat there are many parallels and continuities linking him to the age of Emerson and its cultural predispositions. Write about those subjects Emerson urged his contemporaries, which have in their range the native materials and the unsophisticated but robust activities of the land. And in translating these persons and places and occupations into his narrative, Steinbeck managed to shed over all of it a warm, in fact a slightly sweaty, haze of trustful moral purity. Innocent are these early writings, and he who wrote them; innocent in the manner of Emerson and Thoreau; innocent in the manner of Whitman, detecting or claiming to detect beauty and purity amidst the lowliest squalor. That innocence is lost in the novelist's later novels starting from his strike novel In Dubious Battle. With growing years he becomes more concerned with the dilemma of the good and the evil as represented in his later novels.
The Bible story is about evil and in few novels has the word 'evil' been invoked as frequently as it is in *East of Eden*, but that itself is an evil sign. Moreover, Cathy, the alleged embodiment of evil, is revealingly defined as a moral freak, a preposterous deviation from human nature, rather than an aggravated and disturbing instance of its congenital tendencies.

There is no great image of human experience in *East of Eden* though a great one was intended, and not only because there is no sense of life but even more because there is no sense of death in it. Death is almost always the end of experience in Steinbeck, and the end of his characteristic fictions; it is almost never a beginning, never a dying into life.

Steinbeck's editor, Pascal Covici, has accurately noted that in Steinbeck's works there is an expression of the joy of living. It should be remembered here that by communicating that joy Steinbeck has given many people a great deal of pleasure and revived in them perhaps some lost sense of the sheer excitement of being alive.

The difficulty with Steinbeck's peculiar brand of joyfulness is that it is constitutionally unequipped to deal with the more sombre reality a man must come up against, in these times or in any times, if he is honest and alert.

Steinbeck was up against a part of that reality during the years between 1936 and 1942 when he was writing *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Moon is Down*, and when he was also writing the one work in which his trapped demon did squirm out and get almost completely into the language: *Of Mice and Men*. With the important exception of the latter, the work of those
years is characterised among other things by a seeming refusal, or perhaps an inability, to confront tragic truth. The result of having done so might have been a considerable enlargement of Steinbeck's art; the transformation, for instance, of the earlier earthy humour into what Hawthorne once called 'the tragic power of laughter'.

But the work of those years was characterized, too, by a relatively superficial analysis and a makeshift solution of the case, whether it be social justice or Fascist invasion and oppression. The political movements of the 1930s did tend to submerge the individual in the group, whether or not at the behest of the over-soul, but in reflecting that fact in his fiction Steinbeck has again yielded up his poetry to his politics. And his poetry is not saved by adding above that political tendency a metaphysical principle which even if true, as most probably is, it is totally unsuited for the craft of fiction. Fiction deals with individuals, however intimately related.

Steinbeck's compassion for human loneliness is as deep and abiding as his sympathy for the homeless and the hungry. Loneliness is one of the most important recurring themes in Steinbeck's fiction. From loneliness of the historical man of success, Henry Morgan (Cup of Gold, 1929) to the contemporary man of success, Ethan Hawley (The Winter of Our Discontent, 1961), there are various characters who experience a sense of desolate loneliness in different ways that can only be overcome by companionship.

What seems to be needed, both for society and for art, is not unity, which dissolves the individuals within it, but community, which is a sharing among
distinct human persons. What is needed is not group-men but companions.

Steinbeck has always had trouble focusing on individuals, and he has always known it. And so when Joseph Wayne’s Sister-in-law tells him that he has never known a person, it is in fact Steinbeck admonishing himself.

Therefore it is heartening as well as a trifle surprising to come at last and in *East of Eden* upon the long awaited awareness, the long delayed perception; to arrive in Steinbeck’s pages at the revelation withheld from Joseph Wayne and even from Doc Burton and Jim Casy. Steinbeck’s voice suddenly announces:

> And this I believe. That the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: an idea, religion or government which limits or destroys the individual. This is what I am and what I am about. I can understand why a system build on a pattern must try to destroy such a system. Surely I can understand this, and I hate it and I will fight against it to preserve the one thing that separates us from the uncreative beasts. If the glory can be killed, we are lost. (EOE 111-112)

Steinbeck’s focus has always been man, the ‘common man’ and his struggle through life, loneliness, poverty and despair in an eternal quest for love and peace, a paradise on earth, an ‘Eden’. Through his various novels he has given voice to the dream of the millions, the ever elusive ‘American’ dream of wealth, land, freedom, prosperity, fame. In his naturalistic style he has portrayed
the Joads, the Georges, Lennies, and Dannys in their struggle for survival, a
struggle that is common in the naturalistic world of both men and animals. And
so it is not a surprise to find parallels among the animal world and the human in
the never ending strive for life like in the journey of the 'Turtle' and the 'Joads'.
Steinbeck's characters are all fighters struggling and striving, in an effort that
either results in a reward or a failure, yet they all proclaim:

I was ever a fighter, so — one fight more,

The best and the last!

(Robert Browning)
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