As Stevenson is Junius Maltby's favourite reading
in The Pastures of Heaven, John Steinbeck is my favourite
writer. His mode of writing appeals to me, his 'cunning little
living dolls' amuse me and his way of thinking fascinates me.

It did not take me long to notice, after reading his
Tortilla Flat, that humour is a prominent element in his
art, which makes his works a pleasant reading and so enduringly
alive.

In bestowing its 1962 Nobel Prize for literature on
Steinbeck, Swedish Academy has aptly cited his 'sympathetic
humour' as a distinctive feature of his strength and
individuality. Nevertheless, nothing has specifically been
said about it.

Hence, the purpose of the present study is to examine and
analyse Steinbeck's humour in his novels in relation to an
important American comic tradition of the Southwest.

With this aim in mind, the present thesis is divided
into five chapters. The first chapter, "Comic Muse and the
American Tradition," is a brief and general analysis of
American humour from the colonial days to this day highlighting
the theme, characters, language and other comic modes employed by the major American humorists down through the ages showing Steinbeck's relevance to them which is explored in detail in the subsequent chapters. I have limited the discussion to a relatively small number of the most representative humourists. The choice has been guided partly by technical aspects of comic devices, but it has, however, been somewhat arbitrary and subjective also.

Chapter two, "Beginnings," discusses Steinbeck's humour in his early works detailing his strong and unmistakable ties with the humour of the American Southwest in terms of character, theme, language and structure which he exploits on a larger scale in his more mature works.

Chapter three, "Celebrity," treats the works of his middle period which made him known in America, showing him as a good humorist employing the early comic modes and patterns more successfully and effectively. I have slightly moved away here, from chronological order in including Cannery Row, for it seems to be more related to me to this group of writing in its tone and spirit than Steinbeck's later writings of the post war period.

Chapter four, "Decadence," deals with the works of the last phase of his literary career. It shows that the older
comic devices—oral tall tales, exaggeration, grotesquerie, irony, roguery—are still the integral part of his comic art. His humour has, nevertheless, lost its early spirit of gaiety and sprightliness.

The "Round Up" is a sort of conclusion that in addition to attesting his debt to Southwestern humorists, attempts to establish Steinbeck, like them all, a strictly regional writer with typically American sensibility who found his native life a rich mine for comic writings.