CHAPTER II

BEGINNINGS
In bestowing its 1962 Nobel Prize for literature on John Steinbeck, the Swedish Academy aptly cited "his realistic as well as his imaginative writings, distinguished by a sympathetic humor and a keen social perception" as the sources of Steinbeck's strength and individuality. It could have added other features, the deliberate simplicity of his style, the unpretentiousness of his technique, intensity of his thought, originality and seriousness of his themes and the perfect blending of his narrative and philosophical elements enlivened by his condescending humour toward pompous characters and inflexible institutions.

That Steinbeck wrote in a native tradition and used much of the material and techniques of frontier humour was first pointed by Walter Blair who wrote in his introduction to Native American Humor:

Kriskin Caldwell, Jesse Stuart, Mac Hyman, and on occasion William Faulkner exploited comedy like that in old time Southern humorists' portrayals of shiftless poor whites. John Steinbeck's light books about California's paupers, though they dealt with folk of mixed Spanish, Indian, Mexicans and assorted Caucasian blood showed similar delight in human faklessness.
Steinbeck embarked upon his career of a literary artist with the publication of his two short stories and three comic poems in *The Stanford Spectator* and *Stanford Lit* respectively. There is a curious blending of grotesque and realistic in these stories. In "Fingers of Cloud: A Satire on College Proctorvity" he recalls how a subnormal girl having married a migrant Filipino soon divorces him for he wanted horse heads to be kept in the rain barrel. This is one of the mild witticisms of Steinbeck in his formative years of his beginnings of a comic writer. From this whimsical beginning he launched himself on the most devastating forms of the typical rugged Southern humour. The other story, "Adventures in Arcademy: A journey into the Ridiculous" is an allegory with satirical overtones in which different faculties and subjects in which Stanford provided instructions. His three poems "If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job: HAPPY BIRTHDAY," "If John A. Weaver Had Written Keats' Sonnet in the American Language: ON LOOKING AT NEW BOOK BY HAROLD BELL WRIGHT," and "Atropos: Study of a Very Feminine Obituary Editor" are also comic satires which provide a substantial proof of the humble beginning of a future writer.

Like Southwestern prototypes in Southwestern fables most of Steinbeck's protagonists are cheats, hypocrites,
rogues, imposters, impersonators, murderers, oddballs, brawlers, rowdies, notorious, fornicators, savage, sadist, perverts or even worse, sharing traits that Ransy Snuffle, but Lovingood and Simon Suggs had already established as literary prototypes for comic purposes.

True to tradition, Steinbeck's first novel, *Cup of Gold*, is a story about an irresponsible, lecherous, amoral and dishonest group of buccaneers. From this amorphous band of ragamuffin heroes, Henry Morgan stands out as more cruel and violent, more shrewd and fierce, more avaricious and dishonest and more conceited and erratic, the traits he shares with the earlier Southwestern confidence men who victimized their more credulous fellows.

In his love for adventures and cruelty Morgan has even surpassed his more violent pirate predecessors whose names had been a terror on the sea—Bartolomeo Portuguezes, Roche Braziliano, L'Olonois, Bras de Fer and Edouard Mansvaldt. Legend depicted him as a monster, and many blood-curdling horrible stories were told of his ferocity, his love for cruelty and slaughter for its own sake. His brutishness has been reinforced in the hyperbolic language that he "has three arms and wields a sword in each" and "that Morgan could fire bullets from his finger-tips—that he breathed out sulphurous flames (CG, p.96). He has fought, plundered and burnt many cities; the mere mention
of his name is enough to make his wealthy Spanish enemies shudder in their pants. His cold-blooded killing of Coeur de Gris whom he claims to be his friend, ostensibly for no reason, devoid of love, sympathy, remorse, are the ingredients which continue to reinforce his sense of ingratitude and moral depravity.

As an unabashed and a clever country bumpkin his supreme motive in life is his own self-aggrandizement. His dreams are made of heading a buccaneering empire and becoming respectable by achieving La Santa Roja—the paragon of womanhood. He would stop at nothing to acquire power and wealth nor hesitate to adopt the foulest means in pursuit of that objective. His outrageous lying about Elizabeth, telling concocted different versions of her story to all kinds of people, are all in the same game. He even declines his buccaneers who shed their blood and staked their lives at his command and escapes with all the plunder and ransom when they lay dead drunk after the violence. Although Welsh, to connect him to Arthurian tradition his heritage can not conceal how deeply he is steeped in native American traits which mark him out as an worthy descendent of other mythical American comic personas.
Not only is *To A God Unknown* "far-fetched and eccentric," its characters, too, are strange and despite their often tragic experiences resemble Southwestern heroes in a number of ways. Their indefatigable rural behaviour, queer and uninhibited ways, uncoth manners and slovenliness all reflect the traits of earlier prototypes. In being dissolute, dishonest, undependable, irresponsible and moral, Benjamin, the youngest of the four brothers, resembles but Lovingood. He steals when necessary, knows little restraint in drinking, cheats the people, breaks promises, avoids work where possible and seduces the swelle country girls. He even does not spare the women who mother him and gets killed when he is caught *flagrante delicto* with Juanito's wife.

Strange things happen in *To A God Unknown*. The death of John Wayne, the head of the clan, sets the pattern for the grotesque situations in the novel. In his attempts to establish his patriarchy Joseph indulges in "devilish heathen practices" and "unclean devil worship." Having thought his father's soul to have been perpetuated in an oak tree, he becomes excessively devoted to it. So strongly does he love it that he worships it almost to the point of idolatry. He hangs sacrifices and secretly offers blood, meat and wine to it, talks to it and sets the baby an in it believing it will never let him fall.
For land's fertility's sake brother seduces brother's wife. Death is something natural for them; they hardly weep or cry for the dead and the dead one ceases to be the object of sorrow or worry. They respect living, not the dead. They react to Benjy's death with the indifference one often notices in Southwestern comedy. They regret it no more than an insignificant insect although "everyone loved Benjy and excused and guarded him." S Joseph is neither "glad nor sorry. There is no reason for it to me. It is just so" (GU, p.62). For Sana it was inevitable: "If you throw a great handful of beans at an upturned thimble, one is pretty sure to go in. Now do you see?" (GU, p.63).

Their such lack of appropriate concern for the dead resembles Sut's lack of appropriate concern over the death of his "King Fool" Dad which is better manifested in the opening lines of Harris's yarn, "Nelli Dad's Dead":

"Thar never war a man yet, so mean, but what some time or other, done at least one good thing. Now, my Dad, put off doin his good thing for an awful long time, but at last he did hit, like a white man. He died, by golly! Perfectly square-strait out, an' for keep. Ain't you glad?" (SLY, p.321).
Sut's mother, too, possesses no respect for her dying husband which can be evidenced when she complains that he didn't "ketch the idear twenty years sooner, for then, she mou't 'a done sumthin.' But no, he hilt on, gist to spite her, until she broke off her last tooth, crackin' a corn bread crust, an' then he immegantly went (SLY, p.321). And like Steinbeck's Junius Maltby in *The Pastures of Heaven* who keeps himself engaged in reading his favourite Stevenson when his wife died, she also is engaged in fighting with her neighbour, when her husband is breathing his last.

Henry Morgan in *Cup of Gold* is likewise equally unconcerned over his killing of Coeur de Gris for no reason and for none of his faults. The whole scene is highly reminiscent of Twain's Boggs murder scene in *Huckleberry Finn*. The act of killing of Gris is as deliberate as Boggs's murder at the hands of Sherburn:

"I do not know . . . I must have known, but I have forgotten. I killed a dog once—and I have just killed Jones. I do not know why." (CS, p.124).

The analogy of dog is suggestive of Morgan's arrogance and lack of concern over Gris's death. It is the same kind of experience for Henry Morgan that wine is for his colleagues, or book reading is for Junius Maltby or torturing a cow or setting fire to stray dogs, or tying tins to their tails are to the loafers of Bricksville in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. 
Like Sherburn, Morgan feels no love, no compassion, no remorse and no repentance for his cruel act, but a strong hatred for Gris:

"This is a dead thing," he said musingly. "This is only a dead thing. It will bring flies and sickness. I must have it taken away at once. It will bring the flies into this room!" (CG, p.125).

One is here, of course, reminded of Sut's father being wrapped in an old black bed and put into a coffin converted from a box. Faulkner has also shown such an indifference on the part of the mourners for the dead in his *As I Lay Dying* in Cora Tully's articulation of her wish of not dying the death of Addie Bundren:

Not like Addie Bundren dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart. Glad to lying there with her head propped up so she could watch Cash building the coffin, having to watch him so he would not skimp on it, like as not, with those men not worrying about anything except if there was time to earn another three dollars before the rain come and the river got too high to get across it.

The illiterate Mexican aborigines who have embraced Catholicism, continue to cling to their superstitions in *To A God Unknown*, are unconsciously steeped in the pagan practices. They continue to believe in invoking rain gods through magical incantations and heathen tricks. They are delighted by the protracted rain after prolonged drought and celebrate through non-Christian rites in gay abandon:
The priest could see in his mind how the people were dancing, beating the soft earth to alash with their bare feet. He knew how they would be wearing the skins of animals, although they didn't know why they wore them. The pounding rhythm grew louder and more insistent, and the chanting voices shrill and hysterical. "They'll be taking off their clothes," the priest whispered, "and they'll roll in the mud." (GU, p. 180).

No Christian would countenance the above scene without an admixture of contempt and irreverence. The language of the passage itself demonstrates pristine hatred for pagan practices. The use of words 'roll' and 'rutting' stand out hard and separate with the comparison of the participants with pigs precisely hinting rejection of pagan mess dancing and barbarian culture.

Religion, priests and clergymen are among the oldest butts of ridicule common in all ages and countries. But they became a special focal point in America in the humorous writings of the Southwest with increasing attacks reflecting a freedom from censorship and public appetite for attacks on sanctimoniousness associated with the European tradition. And Steinbeck in such scenes is merely making capital of these aspects that Americans always found ingratiating. His moderation in all matters displays his sneering dislike against all sorts of rigidity. He hardly loses any opportunity to attack those whose advocate orthodoxy in religion. However, his satanic tone of humour makes itself more explicit in his comments on priests and blind adherents. Burton to whom even thunderstorm "is God's voice in anger" has come in for crisp comment in mild comic terms:
Burton was one whom nature had constituted for a religious life. He kept himself from evil and he found evil in nearly all close human contacts. Once, after a service to the church, he had been praised from the pulpit, "A strong man in the Lord," the pastor called him, and Thomas bent close to Joseph's ear and whispered, "A weak man in the stomach." Burton had embraced his wife four times. He had two children. Celibacy was a natural state for him. Burton was never well. His cheeks were drawn and lean, and his eyes hungry for a pleasure he did not expect this side of heaven. In a way it gratified him that his health was bad, for it proved that God thought of him enough to make him suffer. Burton had the powerful resistance of the chronically ill. His lean arms and legs were strong as braided ropes. (GU, p.20).

The whole description has an amount of sneaking but smiling irreverence. Although Protestant in belief, Burton is made to represent Catholic traits, celibacy and avoidance of human contacts that is to say renunciation, Burton's pious activities and strict ascetic life are undercut by his defects thereby deflating his personality. "A strong man in the Lord" is "A weak man in stomach." "Celibacy was a natural state for him" because he could not help the matter since he "was never well." He "embraced his wife four times" is undercut by his hungry eyes "for a pleasure he did not expect this side of heaven." He was happy for it was God's will "to make him suffer."
Weaker in stomach than Burton is Father Angelo, the priest. Having forsaken the pristine holiness expected of him, he has become too wordly. He was a stern man where the church was concerned, but once out of the church, and with the matters of the church out of the way, he was a tender and humorous man. Let him get a mouthful of meat, and a cup of wine in his hand, and there were no eyes that could twinkle more brightly than his. (GU, p. 85).

But Steinbeck's mockery of religion appears more noticeably in his occasional gibes at Catholicism such as "Saint Katy" and in Cup of Gold. "Already two saints had lived and died in Panama—not major saints, perhaps, but of enough importance to make their bones valuable" (GU, p. 394). Although Steinbeck can not, however, be identified with skepticism one often notices in Twain and other American humorists, one can not ignore the flippancy of these remarks. Yet Steinbeck's lack of proper reverence for religion becomes more strongly pronounced in his satire on conventional religiosity and organized church in Cup of Gold. The concluding confession scene in the novel becomes comic with Steinbeck. Henry Morgan's complete disassociation from religion and his outright denial of confession and penance rituals seem to be mild satire on Catholicism.

The stroking continued, but more harshly. The vicar's voice became more loud and authoritative. It was as though, after years of patient waiting,
the Church had at last got Henry Morgan within its power. There was something almost gloating about the voice. (CG, p. 155).

Henry Morgan’s reluctance to repent:

"... How may I repent, sir? I might go over my whole life, naming and repenting every act from the shattering of my first teething ring to my last visit to a brothel. I might repent everything I could remember, but if I forgot one single sin, the whole process would be wasted" (CG, p.155);

and his nonchalant response to the vicar’s repeated warnings of not to die as a heretic: "I am too tired, sir, or too lazy, to consider problems of heresy" (CG, p. 155); record Henry Morgan’s total disregard for the Christian rites and rituals. One can not miss the flippancy of such sardonic remarks as, "She [Elizabeth] was going to see that some compact was made with the Almighty if she could (CG, p.154);

"There was she [Elizabeth] again, intent on making a contract with God" (CG, p. 156), or that Henry prayed only once that too for his mother’s sake because

"... She would have wanted me to pray at least once, more as a proof of her training than for any other reason, a reassurance to her that she had done her duty by me." (CG, p. 155).

The whole confession scene of Cup of Gold, with Morgan lying on death-bed being forced by the vicar to confess and repent his sins through penance, to pray to God for His forgiveness, is more of a mock confession scene than anything serious. It may be shocking to the believers but amusing to others.
More amusing is the irreverent depiction of the Church in his short story "Saint Katy the Virgin." Replete with ribaldry, fantasy, satire and rough fun, it is almost hilarious and seems to have belonged to his Stanford sketches typical of Steinbeck's school days. Although not published until 1936, the stylistic evidence shows that this must be an early story from the same period as *Cup of Gold,* it may have been finished long before 1932 and was sent to his agent in that year which becomes more clear from his letter to McEntosh and Otis of May 17, 1932:

As for St. Katy—I shall send you a copy, and this time keep her if you want her. She was a pleasant afternoon to me. . . . .

Apparently, it had already been seen and read by his agent.

As a story about a bad sow, Katy, who after a long sinful life gets converted, works miracles, cures incurable diseases and is ultimately glorified as a saint and included in the "Calendar of the Elect," it is an open mockery of hagiolatry. Her bones after her death become 'holy relic' and are carefully preserved and reposed "on a bed of crimson satin" inside "a gold-bound jeweled reliquary, " to be revered, kissed and rubbed by the believers.
People come great distances to kiss the little box, and such as do, go away leaving their troubles behind them. This holy relic has been found to cure female troubles and ringworm. There is a record left by a woman who visited the chapel to be cured of both. She deposes that she rubbed the reliquary against her cheek, and at the moment her face touched the holy object, a hair mole she had possessed from birth immediately vanished and has never returned.10

Perhaps, Alymer, the scientist in Hawthorne’s story “The Birthmark,” who tried to remove from his beautiful wife’s face the tiny birthmark which he believed to have marred her beauty, did not know of Saint Katy, he would have otherwise saved her from succumbing to untimely death.

The mocking tone of the story is condescending toward religious sentimentality, canonization, holy relics, rites and rituals featured in almost equal measure in his parody of Arthurian legends in Tortilla Flat, where Pirate’s dogs have mystical visions of Saint Francis, and Danny, after his escape from prison, performs escape rituals necessary for a run away prisoner:

When the brilliant sun awakened Danny about noon, he determined to hide all day to escape pursuit. He ran and dodged behind bushes. He peered out of the undergrowth like a hunted fox. And, at evening, the rules having been satisfied, he came out and went about his business.11

“Saint Katy the Virgin” contains unmistakable parodies of the long standing medieval belief of exorcism; the condescending tone is set from the very start in Steinbeck’s suggestion that the church has become more wordly, a symbol of social status and respectability than religious when it
considered Roark "a bad man because he laughed too much at the wrong times and at the wrong people" (LV, p.128).

The "two great tears squeezed out of the eyes of Katy" (LV, p.133) parodies the crucifix; lion's nobility is undercut by "a beast built for parables;" "there is nothing to differentiate between the Grace of God knocking it (the hymen) out from the inside or the wickedness of man from the outside" (LV, p.136) ridicules virginity; whereas the monk scandal is parodied in these words: "For a while it was thought that, because of her sex, she should leave the monastery and enter a nunnery" (LV, p.135).

The problem of Katy's virginity resolved by the traditionally shrewd barber—Katy was "a virgin by intent" if not physically—obliquely ridicules those selfish priests and religious authorities who bent religious practice into conformity with their own theories and interest. They are represented by Father Angelo in To a God Unknown as well as the priests figuring in the story itself. This materialistic concern of the church and its priests is most explicitly satirised in Abbots's scolding of Brother Paul for his good act of converting the pigs: "There are plenty of Christians. This year there's a great shortage of pigs" (LV, p.135). Since the pig is now Christian, they cannot slaughter it.
This gross comedy of the beatification of a new combining all the elements of grotesquerie and absurd, bawdry and satire, parody and beast-epic genre, although allows Steinbeck to direct his satire against hagiolatry, "religious expediency" and Catholic rituals; the incident of the conversion of Katy is entered into with such comic extravagance that the writer's satiric vehemence is almost minimised.

Much of the satire on religion in American literature is an attack on the Protestant 'work ethic' popularized by Benjamin Franklin in his writings about Poor Richard in Eighteenth century. It is interesting to note that Steinbeck's humour here is also an attack like Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, from the loafer's point of view on Franklin's 'early to bed, early to rise' philosophy from "The Way to Wealth" the only defense open to "good old boys" like the lazy Rip Van Winkle, the bums, loafers and outcasts that reaches culmination in *Cannery Row*.

Qualities other than conventionally virtuous ones endear Steinbeck's characters as well as liken them to the established comic prototypes. Jimmie Munroe in *The Pastures of Heaven* is "enormously cynical" and seducer of young girls; Edward Wicks is a hypocrite, who although "had never had more than five hundred dollars at one time in his life" created a false impression of his being
very rich, and commanded respect through his fictitious accounts and false sales and purchases of bonds and shares duly entered in his big ledger; Raymond Bank is a company-loving unimaginative man but enormously interested in witnessing violence, death and hangings; Miss Molly Morgan, the new school teacher, is an unconscious rogue largely but indirectly responsible for Tularecito's confinement to Napa Sanatorium; Vasquez is a thief and a murderer and Molly's father is a rough, hard and suffering drunkard while Molly herself is an example of supreme hypocrite who always makes a false show of her emotion for her father but when she encounters him she gives up the job without experiencing even the slightest emotion of affection for him. Junius Haltby, though not a rogue, is lazy and slothful.

Among the subjects most favoured in American humour is idleness. Writers had turned to laziness over and again for the portrayals of their characters. Of all the cast of lazy characters in American humour, the absent-minded and irresponsible Junius Haltby in The Pastures of Heaven is probably the laziest. He surpasses even many of the prototypes of the frontier man with whom he bears unmistakable affinities. He is, in his laziness, a composite of William Byrd's 'lubbers' and Washington Irving's' Rip Van Winkle. Stories were told of his idleness in his neighbourhood; that his slothfulness killed his wife, that he was reading when she died.
Over a period of ten years of his stay in the valley, its warm and salubrious climate made him grow "superbly lazy." His talents, like that of Rip Van Winkle who "was ready to attend anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible" (CMI, p.3), lie in deliberate avoidance of work. Mrs. Maltby although makes him work in the kitchen garden he soon retires in the shade of sycamore tree and was content to sit in the sun and dangle his feet in the stream much in the manner as Rip drifts away to the forest or to the tavern where he sits "in the shade through a long, lazy summer's day, talking listlessly over village gossip or telling endless sleepy stories about nothing" (CMI, p.5).

Maltby hires a servant, Jakob, to work on the farm, but he too, following his master's footsteps grows equally lazy and "did no more work than his employer." Hence Maltby farm, like that of Rip's, begins to dwindle under his mismanagement.

As relaxed hunting is Rip's chief pleasure, reading Stevenson and talking on a variety of subjects is Maltby's favourite activity:

They didn't make conversation; rather they let a seedling of thought sprout by itself, and then watched with wonder while it sent out branching limbs. They were surprised at the strange fruit their conversation bore, for they didn't direct their thinking, nor trellis nor trim it the way so many people do. (PR, p.52).
Even in his mode of living Junius shares common traits with Rip. Rip has a precarious living and violates the principles of thrift, prosperity and material comfort. He is one of those happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound. (CTW, p.4).

Sunk in sloth, Junius Malthe, his son and the servant, Jakob, live in utter poverty. While other settlers in the valley prosper he grows poorer and poorer. His farm, with its overgrown weeds, untrimmed fruit trees and fallen fences, look abandoned. His house too is unclean, door-yard littered and windows dirty. They casually threw seeds and were content with things they got without efforts. Often they were without food when a hen’s nest was not found on the farm at supper time. For a long time Junius did not have new clothes; his overalls were torn at many places, and he had no shoes. His blond hair was unkempt, his long beard meted and untrimmed. And like Rip, he passes the legacy of his disposition to his son, Robbie, who equally evinced a hereditary penchant for laziness. He wore “an ancient pair of overalls, cut at the knees and seat, a blue shirt from which the collar was gone, and nothing else. His long hair hung over his grey eyes like the forelock of a range pony.” (PH, p.54).

Other characters in Steinbeck’s short stories, if not lazy, display other traits of comic heroes of the Southwestern tradition that the virtuous, find unsavoury. The itinerant
tinker in "The Chrysanthemums" is a confidence man who having evinced false interest in Elisa's gardening and flowers becomes a welcome guest and departs with the money she was formerly reluctant to give for mending the pots and flower pots that he cheats her out of by pretending he wanted the seedlings they contained. The husband in "The White Quail" kills the white quail his wife loves seemingly accidentally to relieve his own frustrations; the lady in "The Snake" is a sadist who unconsciously derives pleasure from watching a big male snake devouring a white rat. And those who offer Johnny Bear 'whiskey' in the bar to encourage his mimicry are rogues. The barber, traditionally known for his shrewdness, who solves the problem of Katy's virginity in "Saint Katy the Virgin" is a true epitome of roguery. Jelka's cousin who tries to disrupt her married life in "The Murder" is another version of Sut, whereas her father is a misogynist whose wedding advice to his son-in-law is to continue beating the wife to save the marriage and avert a certain divorce:

"Don't be big fool, now," he said. "Jelka is a Slav girl. He's not like American girl. If he is bad, beat him. If he's good too long, beat him too. I beat his mama. Papa beat my mama. Slav girl! He's not like a man that don't beat hell out of him." (LV, p. 116).

The passage points to the element of misogyny and male superiority which had been a source of consistent
comment and laughter and can be perceived throughout the entire canvas of American comic writings from the earliest days to the present. The theme is present from the days of William Byrd's male North Carolinians leaving the household responsibilities to their females while they smoked and led a carefree life through to Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle who drifted to the forest when Mrs. Winkle tried to shame him into working up, to the cantankerous wives in James Thurber's "Unicorn in the Garden," "The Life of 'Alonzo Mitty,'" "The Catbird Seat" and "The Battle Between the Sexes". Based on the moral that to treat a wife unsympathetically and subject her to beatings at intervals is necessary to maintain a marriage, the story has a lot of resemblance to the writings of Byrd, Irving and Thurber. Junius Maitby also symbolises that hatred for woman in his aversion to work that asserts itself after his wife's untimely death. In this story woman suffers and is hurt by her husband's callousness and slothfulness much in the manner Mrs. Winkle does in Irving's story. In other stories wives have been the source of untold miseries to their husbands. Mary Teller, the selfish and narcissistic wife, in "The White Quail" has almost estranged her husband from her life and constantly keeps on nagging him to kill the cat whose presence was dangerous for her albino bird, the beautiful object of her garden. And the simple husband, having not known to cope with the impatient wife, ultimately frees
himself from this bondage of affectionate nagging in much the same manner as does the poor husband in Thurber's "Unicorn in the Garden." Instead of the cat, Harry kills the quail itself. The curtain is drawn on fear and nagging reminders of the wife about the safety of the bird.

"The Vigilante" is another variation of the same theme; it shows how a wife's shrewishness and irrational suspicion can convert an otherwise peaceful life of a husband into a hell. From Mike's look of blissful gratification caused by his participation in lynching a negro, his slick and petulant wife accuses him of having been with a woman. The story ends with the husband, looking into a mirror at his face and surprised "By God, she was right," he thought. "That's just exactly how I do feel" (LV, p.95).

An even more frightening bondage of married life is depicted in "The Harness" through Peter Randall's failure to assert himself even against his dead wife. Not only does the wife wreak fury and havoc and cause troubles to a husband during her life time, but she even continues doing so after she is dead. Peter Randall is a sympathetic portrayal of a henpecked husband, who decides to throw off the chest harness and elastic belts, he had been kept in, in order to be shapely, much against his wish by his wife, after her death. By the time, she dies, however, he is grown so much used to his bondage that he finds it not just difficult to discard the harness but impossible to live without it.
"She didn't die dead," he said thickly. "She won't let me do things. She's worried me all year about those peas." His eyes were wondering. "I don't know how she does it." Then he frowned. His palm came out, and he tapped it again. "But you mark, Ed Chappell, I won't wear that harness, and I damn well won't ever wear it. You remember that." His head dropped forward again. But in a moment he looked up. "I been drunk," he said seriously. "I been to fancy houses." He edged out confidentially toward Ed. His voice dropped to a heavy whisper. "'But it's all right, I'll fix it. When I get back, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to put in electric lights. Emma always wanted electric lights." (LV, p.88).

The constant nagging and demands of the wife make him virtually and mentally a slave and later he finds himself unable to do away with the mental shackles. For Peter Randall his wife had become a part and parcel of himself, and she had so deeply embedded his emotions that he becomes extremely miserable when she was no more. The wife is thus made to look tyrannical through the depiction of husband's discomfiture and helplessness.

But these compassionately portrayed countrymen, rural and uncouth and hardly educated, speak a language rich and racy in folk idiom which can hardly be called their own.

Cup of Gold abounds in lyrical outbursts and grandiloquence; To A God Unknown is full of formalised idioms and elevated poetic speech often amounting to rhetoric heights.

Characters in The Pastures of Heaven and The Long Valley often speak biblical language. The Bible had been a great influence on Steinbeck he read it several times imbibing its lyrical beauty. Probably no other writer had a more keen and accurate ear for biblical rhythmic cadences than
Steinbeck:

"And thou—often hast Anunn set its fanged maw to
entrap the little pinch of life thou carriest about,
but thou hast made thy path to go around its snaring.
A thousand centuries hast thou lived since earth and
sea struggled in thy generation, and a thousand sons
shalt thou carry about the little pinch of life that
was given thee, so only thou shalt hesitate it from Anunn,
the Chaos." ( CG, p.29 ).

In this passage Gwenlinae in Cup of Gold is making a
prophecy and, quite naturally, her predictions should be
in profoundly mystic language in order to be more effective
and should be clothed in the garb of biblical phraseology.
Moreover, she is a minor character who makes a fleeting
appearance in the beginning of the novel only. But the
same may be true of Steinbeck's major characters also; they
can be seen frequently and unfailingly using the same refined
and over-elegant diction. For instance, the lyrical and
biblical overtones of the following passage comes from
Gomez's Mexican Indian hiredman, Pancho, who asks Tularacito:

"Where goest thou, little Frog? . . . "But
why takest thou the shovel?" ( PH, p.35 ).

And he advises Tularacito not to go in search of his people
living under the earth:

"Do not go, Little Frog! Listen to your old friend,
your father in God, and do not go! Out in the sage
I found thee and saved thee from the devils, thy
relatives. Thou art a little brother of Jesus now.
Go not back to thine own people! Listen to an old
man, Little Frog!" ( PH, p.35 ).
Tularecito also responds in the same sort of language:

"Thou hast said they are my people," he exclaimed. "Pancho warned him, "Go back to the devil, thy father, then. I am not good enough to fight this evil. It would take a saint. But see! At last I make the sign against thee and against all thy race."

(PH, p.35).

Mama Torres too in the story, "The Flight" is often heard speaking:

"Some lazy cow must have got into thy father's family, else how could I have a son like thee."
And she said, "When I carried thee, a sneaking lazy coyote came out of the brush and looked at me one day. That must have made thee so."

(LV, p.27).

And those who do not indulge in this biblical language often go into rhapsodies when their sentiments are aroused by the strong emotion of joy or sorrow. Henry Morgan in Cup of Gold suddenly breaks out in lyrical and impassioned eloquence when he evokes his colleagues' avarice, hunger, lust and vanity:

"Gold and jewels past hope of counting are in the city. Every man of you will be rich if we succeed."

"Think of the roasted meats, the barrels of wine in the cellars, the spiced puddings. Imagine them!"

"Women slaves there are in the city, and thousands of other women. God knows! Your difficulty will be only in judging which to choose from the multitude that will fall to us. These are not grubby field women, but great ladies who lie in silken beds. How will your skins feel in beds like those, do you suppose?"

"The names of those who take part in this fight will climb the stairs of history. This is no pillage, but glorious war. Imagine to yourselves the people of Tortuga pointing to you and saying, 'That man was in the fight at Panama. That man is a hero, and rich.' Think of how the women of Gooves will run after you when you go home again. There is the Cup of Gold before you."

(CG, p.108).
Joseph Wayne in *To A God Unknown* also speaks in the similar strain; his speech too often attains rhetoric heights when he tries to philosophize things:

“This is a space between the real and the clean, unwavering real, undistored by the senses. Here is a boundary. Yesterday we were married and it was no marriage. This is four 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. I have a moment in my heart, different in shape, in texture, in duration from any other moment.” (GU, p. 52).

Despite it all, Steinbeck maintains spectatorial distance, he never allows his objectivity to be contaminated. The narrator takes on a gentlemanly mask and his tone becomes increasingly inflected in the thumb-nail sketches of his poor rustic characters living at the lowest level of sentience when he describes their wild and mundane activities in the most refined language. Benjy’s frivolous minstrelsy in *To A God Unknown* is described as “singing gloriously.” Junius Maltby in *The Pastures of Heaven* grows “superbly lazy” and is “gloriously happy” and people succumbed before Robbie’s “glorious diction,” the destruction and pillage of Panama in *Cup of Gold* becomes “glorious war”...a technique which Steinbeck employed more frequently and on a larger scale in his *Tortilla Flat*. The condescending tone of these remarks bears close affinity to a similar technique.
the writings of the humorists of the old nineteenth century Southern frontier. This kind of felicitous incongruity arising from the antithetical phrasing seems to be at work when William Byrd's "lubbers" "gravely consider" whether to go and take a small heat at the hoe. Jim Doggett in T.B. Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas, is reported by the narrator to be sitting in "a grave silence." Not long back, Faulkner has, too, incorporated the same antithetical phrasing into comic art when he described the hoodwinked farmers in The Hamlet chasing the wild horses:

They went out; they didn't look back. They tiptoed up the hall and crossed the veranda and descended into the moonlight. Now that they could pay attention to it, the silver air seemed to be filled with faint and sourceless sounds—shouts, thin and distant, again a brief thunder of hooves on a wooden bridge, more shouts faint and thin and earnest and clear as bells; once they even distinguished the words: "Whoey. Read him." (The Hamlet, p. 275).

It is an obvious example of the juxtaposition of high and low style, elegance and vernacular antics.

Through this manipulation of language Steinbeck has come upon a doubly advantageous comic formula; instead of lifting his characters, their use of such language renders them look absurd and ridiculous. On the other hand, this usage burlesques, the highfautin' diction of the aristocratic whites, it thus turns the table on the sophisticated society and the elite's use of language.

This kind of narrator's highbrow attitude is more evidently displayed in the comic portrayals of his individual
characters. He has described them in comic terms, as Byrd II Longstreet, Hooper Harris and Baldwin had earlier done. See the description of two inseparable Burgundians in Sun of Gold:

The first was a little fat man with a face like a red bloated man. He was nervous and excitable. The slightest public attention threw him into a fit of embarrassment. When he was spoken to his face became redder, and he gave the impression of a bug frantically looking for a board under which to hide. His companion, The Other Burgudian, was his defender and guide. The Other Burgudian was taller and more powerfully made, although his left arm was gone at the elbow* (CG, p.99).

This 'incongruous pair' in their physical appearance and mutual interdependence, anticipate Steinbeck's another pair of George and Lennie of Of Mice and Men. Very much like them, these inseparable Burgundians are hardly seen away from each other. They sit, talk and eat together and like George's protecting care to Lennie, The Other Burgudian kept his sheltering arm "about the shoulders of his dumpy friend in a gesture of protection" (CG, p.99).

Willie's twisted, dirty and white face caused by illness, looking unconnected to his body, his furtive and frightened eyes, grimaced and contracted mouth curved at the end almost like parrot's beak and his pinched and bony nose make him equally an ugly character in To A God Unknown.

But The Pastures of Heaven offers some of Steinbeck's ugliest and the most repulsive characters. Gangling, big nosed and heavy-jawed Pat "looked very much like Lincoln as a young man. His figure was as unfitted for clothes as Lincoln's was. 
His nostrils and ears were large and full of hair. They looked as though furry little animals were hiding in them. (PH, p.99).

Not only in his shambling ape-like stride Allen Hueucker is a queer and grotesque monster but he is almost a living clod of clay. "Little boys who wanted to insult their friends did so by pointing to Allen and saying, 'There goes your brother.'" (PH, p. 68). He himself did not like his hobgoblin appearance and in order to hide his ugliness under the tangled growth of hair he began to grow whiskers. But nature too, seemed to have conspired against him and, instead of full growth of beard only the coarse, sparse stubble grew and that too in the wrong places which helped to intensify "his simian appearance" all the more.

The nineteen-year-old boy, Pepe, in "The Flight," although otherwise gentle and affectionate, has a loose and gagging eagle nose and "a tall head, pointed at the top, and from its peak, coarse black hair grew down like a thatch all around. Over his smiling little eyes Nana cut a straight bang so he could see" (LV, p.26), which belongs to fantasy rather than to actuality.

Tularacito "whom God has not completely finished" is a cretin, queer, misshapen and erratic, a supreme example of grotesquerie both in appearance and behaviour. His ancient and dry eyes, his face, physical strength and oddity all give an impression of his being a prehistoric troglodyte. As a baby he
had short, chubby arms, and long, loose-jointed legs. Its large head sat without interval of neck between deformedly broad shoulders. The baby's flat face, together with its peculiar body, caused it automatically to be called Tularcito, Little Frog, although Franklin Goman often called it Coyote. "For," he said, "there is in this boy's face that ancient wisdom one finds in the face of a coyote." (PH, p. 29).

Though a peaceable sort of careless fellow in the main, who chooses to quarrel with nobody, he is occasionally likely to be saucy, terribly erratic and almost mad when his drawings are erased and his products are broken. Once his anger is aroused, it can hardly be abated. His physical strength combined with the violence of his unrestrained anger which could wreck the school and kill innocent people ultimately requires his confinement to an asylum after his murderous assault on Bert Munroe.

Clumsiest among the cast of repulsive characters is Johnny Bear in the story "Johnny Bear." He is a true picture of deformity, almost a presordial monster. With his bobbed forward black matted head, long loosely hung out arms, short and bowed legs and strange square feet, he appears to have been made "standing upright as a trick." His movements were creeping and prowling and he swung his arms jerkily.

All these thumbnail sketches produce comedy, reminiscent of the earlier humorists which reaches back to the beginnings of American history. William Byrd II described the poor rustics and Longstreet described Randy Sniffler, Harris described Sut Lovingood in much the same grotesque comic terms as does Steinbeck here.
Other comic devices—comic metaphors, vivid imagery and hyperbole which are apparently the legacies of the earlier humour—are not lacking in these works. Steinbeck has rather a natural flair for such devices; they are rather his forte for they help him render the intended comic effects more effectively. His vivid imagery based upon a frequent, wild and complex use of epithets, similes and metaphors are strikingly lively and appealing. "He swooped like a lazy hawk" (PH, p. 23); Selka "whined softly like a cold puppy" (LV, p. 125); Elisa "crouched low like a fawning dog" (LV, p. 8); Mary Teller "sat as still as a mouse" (LV, p. 22); Johnny Bear's "arms enfolded Alex as the tentacles of an anemone enfolded a crab" (LV, p. 113); Thomas Wayne "was afraid of the wild emotion as an animal is afraid of thunder" (GU, p. 84); "The men looked fearfully at him, as small birds gaze at an approaching snake" (CG, p. 42); and "on the deck the seaman swarmed like the angry populace of a broken hive" (CG, p. 40). It is clear how the bird and animal imagery suggested by the words like 'swooped,' 'whined,' 'whispered,' 'swarmed,' and similes like 'looked fearfully at him, as small birds gaze at an approaching snake,' 'sat as still as a mouse,' evoke a live picture adding momentum and intensity to the intended effect with rare economy of words.

Steinbeck also draws heavily upon nature to depict the beauty of his female characters: "Jeik had eyes as large and questioning as a doe's eye" (LV, p. 116); "Katherine had
the firm freshness of a new weed, and the brimming vigour
of a mare" which "she lost . . . as a flower does once it
has received pollen" ( PH, p. 117 ); La Santa Roja "is lovely
as the sun" ( CG, p. 76 ); are very much reminiscent of the
colourful and vivid imagery employed by Harris to suggest
Sicily's seductive charms:

She shows among women like a sunflower among dorg
fennil, or a hollyhock in a patch ove smartweed.
Such a buzzim! Jis' think ove two snow balls wif a
strawberry stuck but-sained intu bof on an (SLY, p. 69);

Or when Sut describes her beauty:

Her har'a es black as a crow's wing at midnite . . . an'
her cheeks an' lips es rosey as a pearsh's gills in
dorgwood blossum time--an' nuch a smile! Why, when hit
struck yu far an' squar hit felt jis' like a big ho'n
ove unrectified ole Munongahaley . . . (SLY, pp. 69-70).

Faulkner too compares Rule, ove fertile land:

The fine land rich and fecund and foul: eternal and
impervious to him who claimed title to it oblivious,
drawing to itself tenfold the quality of living seed
its owner's whole life could have secreted and
compoundend, producing a thousandfold the harvest he
could ever hope to gather and save. (The Hamlet, p. 111).

But it is in terms of the effects La Santa Roja has on
Henry Morgan and men in general that Steinbeck comes closer
to Harris. Sut speaks of Sicily's effect on men:

Sich an 'oman cud du more devilmint nur a loose
stud hoss et a muster ground', ef she only know'd
what tools she totes, an' I' se sorter beginin
tu think she no's the use ove the las' durnd wan,
tu a dot. (SLY, p. 70).
Steinbeck also describes the effect of *La Santa Roja* in almost identical terms when Henry Morgan says: "she is a danger to the peace of nations and to the peace of men's minds." (CG, p.81). The effects which her beauty exercises on Henry Morgan are presented in "motion-picture's impressionistic technique" in intermittent statements enclosed in parenthesis during descriptive passages and dialogues: "(There is a woman in the Cup of Gold, and they worship her for unnameable beauties.)" (CG, p.82); "(There is a woman in the Cup of Gold, and she is lovely as the sun.)" (CG, p.83); "(La Santa Roja is in Panama.)" (CG, p.83); "(There is a woman in Panama.)" (CG, p.83); "(—She is lovely as the sun.)" (CG, p.83). On reaching Panama, Coer de Gris believes, that "everyone will be at his friend's throat over the Red Saint" (CG, p.84). That's why to avoid general suicide she wears veil:

... 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. (CG, p.77).

Such an extravagant portrayal of *La Santa Roja*'s beauty is in accord with the native habit of exaggeration of oral tales. That Steinbeck was an American rather a strictly regional writer with typically American sensibility, his penchant for wild American extravagance bears testimony to it. His comic extravagance reaches its piquancy and fantastic heights in his descriptions of the exploits of the old buccaneers, the sea heroes of
past days whom Henry Morgan wanted and set out to
overshadow. Bartolomeo Portugues having been arrested
near Campeche the
gibbet was erected on the shore for his hanging. He
watched them put it up from his prison aboard
ship. And in the night before his execution, he
stabbed his guard and swam away, supported by a
kag. Before eight days had passed, he came again
with pirates in a long canoe and stole the same
ship away from the harbour of Campeche. (CG, p.71).

The tone is of inflations and the anecdote contains
tall-tale effects. Better than this, there are anecdotes
about Roche Brazilians and L'Ollonais where comic
exaggeration gains high point. The following passages
describe their real hatred for Spain and their strong and
fierce love of cruelty in hyperbolic language:

Once when his ( Roche Brazilians' ) ship was
wrecked in Castilla de Oro, he killed most of
a troop of Spanish horse and used their beasts
to ride off on. When the men of Spain were
near him, Roche was a foaming beast. It was told
that once he roasted prisoners on green spits
over a slow fire. (CG, p.71).

But the most cruel and the most feared man in the
western ocean was L'Ollonais whose arrival in Yucatan
converted it into "heaps of stones and ashes" and made
the mice fled into the jungle.

The comic extravagance, crudity and ferocity highly
characteristic of American oral yarns are unmistakably
present in these anecdotes. To build up a picture of
horror and fright, to portray buccaneers' ferocity and unrelenting habits, to demonstrate their brutish monstrosity, the details are exaggerated and piled upon details until they become laughable. They are rather tall tales in miniature. A joke reported to be true about Junius Maltby's purchase of a goat is more funny than anyone of these anecdotes. After his wife's death, Maltby, in order to feed his child, goes to purchase a she-goat; he instead bought a he-goat. This made the people of the valley roar with laughter and have profound discussions—clearly storyteller's exuberant elaborations:

They told how, on a doctor's advice, Junius bought a goat to milk for the baby. He didn't inquire into the sex of his purchase nor give his reason for wanting a goat. When it arrived he looked under it, and very seriously asked, "Is this a normal goat?"

"Sure" said the owner.

"But shouldn't there be a bag or something immediately between the hind legs?—for the milk, I mean." (PH, pp.50-51).

Marked by utmost gravity on Maltby's part, his ignorance about the difference of sex, masculinity of tone make the anecdote a good plot for a tall tale. It amused Miss Morgan, the school teacher, so much that she later developed it into a story that was never published.

The tall tales, however, are not wholly absent in these works of Steinbeck. The best and the most notable is one in Cup of Gold that tells how a drowned woman returned to ship to wreak vengeance upon its crew. Like the Mississippi steamboat scene of Thorpe's "The Big Bear
of Arkansas", the scene here too is a ship, Bristol Girl
The following typical passage evokes admirably well the
situation and the circumstances appropriate to a tall tale:

And in the nights he lay back quietly while
the men talked of wonders seen and imagined by
mile-long serpents which coiled about ships and
swallowed them, and of turtles so huge that they
had trees and streams and whole villages on their
backs and only sank once in five hundred years.
Under the swinging lamps they told how Finns
could whistle up a deadly storm for their revenge;
how there were sea-rats that swam to the ships and
gnawed holes through the planking until the ships
sank. They spoke shudderingly of how one, sighting
the dread, slimy kraken, might never see land again
for the curse that was on him. Water spouts were in
their speech, and mooing cows that lived in the seas
and suckled their calves like land cows; and ghost
ships sailing endlessly about the ocean looking for
a lost port, their gear worked by seamen who were
bleached skeletons. (CG, p. 43).

The gathering of the pirates and relating past
stories of horror of almost incredible happenings is very
much reminiscent of the night time gatherings of story
telling session of of fireside yarn spinning. Against
this background is the narrator introduced—"On such a
night, Tim stretched himself and said"—in a single
sentence who in a familiar and apologetic tone declares
with great theatricality:

"I know nothing of your big snakes at all, nor
have I seen the kraken, God save me! But I've
bit of a tale myself if you'll be listening."(CG,p.43).

With this assertion he begins much in the rambling
manner of Southwestern oral stories to unfold his tale
straying away from his original story:
"'Twas when I was a boy like this one here
and I sailing in a free ship that tuck'd about the
ocean picking up here and there---sometimes a few
black slaves and now and then a gold ring from a
Spanish craft that couldn't help itself---whatever we
could get. We had a master by election and no papers
at all, but there were different kinds of flags, and
they on the bridge. If we did be picking out a man of
war in the glass, then we ran for it." (CG, p. 43).

Having thus kindled the curiosity of his listeners
and thereby getting them fully prepared for his yarn, Tim
launches into comic extravagant monologue almost
uninterrupted, dominating the whole company with his tale
till the end.

Told in toothsome vernacular and narrator's salty
language and drawling voice, most suited to a tall tale,
enliven his character. Narrator's affected gravity
coupled with conversational style, ungrammatical structure
and common expressions impart an otherwise incredible
fantasy a pleasant quality. Vivid phrases catch the
action: "and they [hands] came through the side and
started to ripping the planks off like they were paper."
Day to day racy expressions: "Well, any way as I'm telling
you," we are a free crew . . . and you the master by
election," "we want the woman . . . and if we don't be
getting her there'll be a bit mutiny in a minute." "That
was all," "I seen it Oh, my God I seen it," "Oh my God! Save me!" "(CG, pp. 43-44); one often comes across.
It also ends in the manner of an anecdote; in a voice full of surprising feeling, the narrator passes judgement:

"... But they say on clear nights in the Indian Ocean you can be seeing the poor murdered Hindu ghosts chasing the dead da Gama about in the sky. And I have heard that these same Hindus are a very unfruitful people to pick out, and you going in for murder." (CG, p. 44).

It is indeed Tim's singular manner of recounting a tale that makes the anecdote interesting and leaves his audiences fully convinced.

Most of Steinbeck's novels and many of his stories of this period end on a tragic note. The Cup of Gold is a novel about a man, Henry Morgan, who has although achieved material success, fails in his prime achievement—the possession of La Santa Roja's legendary beauty. He grows almost monomanical in his desire for her, just as Joseph Wayne in To A God Unknown is fanatically concerned with establishing a patriarchy. Morgan, from the very beginning, is very much aware of his desire's accompanying failure: "But I fear I go to my death. It is a dreadful thing to be attempting. If this is my desire, I must, though I die." (CG, p. 83). The irony does not lie in his failure, it rather resides in La Santa Roja’s unnameable beauty turning out, quite contrary to his expectation, nothing more than ordinary and her refusal to live under his banner as his wife. The ironic point is that a man in spite of his outward seeming happiness may be inwardly miserable, that his material success can not, however, be equated with his happiness.
Similarly, Edward Hicks', popularly known as Sharks, long-cherished dream of affluence in the Pastures of Heaven is climactically destroyed, and he is made to accept humiliation and the harsh realities of life. The half-wit, Tularecito, otherwise an innocent and harmless creature is finally sent to Napa asylum for attacking Bert Munroe. Mrs. Helen Van Deventer has ultimately to leave her neurotic daughter, Hilda, whom she has to affectionately fostered and guarded against every evil. Mr. Junius Malthby's peaceful and carefree living is jeopardized when he is made to realize his impoverished state by the neighbours' offering his son, Robbie, new and decent clothes. Giving up the blissful life of the valley he moves to town to resume his former job of an accountant for better prospects and good living. Miss Morgan, the school teacher, who very much loves her father and often recollects her childhood days—when her father returned home from long tours with many presents and stories to tell—leaves the valley to save her illusion of her father's greatness when she suspects the drunken hired man in the car to be her old man whom she so affectionately venerated. Lopez sisters' so called respectable and peaceful living is threatened when Mrs. Munroe jokingly remarks, quite unaware of its far graver consequences, about one of the sisters going with a man in a buggy. Having discarded the valley life they move to town to lead a brothel life and accept "the money of shame." Mr. Raymond Banks who likes
and often attends executions at the invitation of his San Quentin's warder friend quite unconscious of the suffering and the violence caused to the hanged, discontinues doing so when Munroe kindles his soft human emotions. Mae Munroe's passing adoration of Pat Humbert's house instills in him a desire to live a decent life and to marry the admirer. He arranges his house on Vermont style but he becomes soon desperate "on the point of realising life" on learning that Mae Munroe was to marry another man. Richard Whiteside's dream of establishing a dynasty, like that of Joseph Wayne's patriarchal monomania in To A God Unknown, is shattered when he marries Mae Munroe and leaves the valley with his burnt mansion behind.

All of them, even Henry Morgan of the Cup of Gold who had his own illusion of idealistic fantasies of feminine charm, have been the victims of their fostered illusions one after another; but they survived them all by resigning themselves to the resultant disillusionment. This irony and disillusionment has been reinforced in the opening pages of the prologue and the epilogue to The Pastures of Heaven. About 1776 a Spanish Corporal in search of an Indian worker happened to visit the title valley from the mountain ridge and was greatly amazed to see it's unspoiled beauty: "Here are the green pastures of Heaven to which our Lord leadeth us." (PH, p. 6). This increasing irony has
again been suggested by Bert Monroe's jovial remarks concerning his past successful business ventures after his taking possession of the cursed Battle Farm:

"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." (PH, p.15).

But T.B. Allen did one better saying:

"... 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." (PH, p.15).

And, that is precisely true as the irony is revealed during the course of each story contained in The Pastures of Heaven.

The resulting disillusionment is emphasised in the epilogue, too, when looking down into the valley some tourists wish to have the peace of the valley in their busy and noisy life, and also in the bus driver's remarks:

"I guess it sounds kind of funny to you folks, but I always like to look down there and think how quiet and easy a man could live on a little place." (PH, p.127).

But, by the time the end is reached the reader becomes fully aware that the valley's seemingly attractive quietude and tranquility is nothing but a mirage; that it like Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach offers "neither joy, nor love, nor light, Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help, for pain..."
The bitterness, which the catastrophic end of these ironic tales carries leaves the reader in a confused state of mind. Unable to react to the exposure to the characters and their emotions, he is half amused and half pained. But, when a character suffers climatically or Nemesis visits him without causing him physical harm or serious injury, one's normal reaction is naturally laughter. The catastrophic end of Steinbeck's novels and stories thus makes his humor grim imparting it the characteristic blackness of American comic tradition.

His characters live in a world of illusion which probably does not exist, and they are impractical, rather fools enough, to understand life itself, that life does not move the way one wishes.

Many of the tales collected in *The Long Valley,* too are built on the same kind of typical irony and have the same ring of black humour of the earlier volume, although some of them have little or no humour at all. "Breakfast" is merely a sketch about a family of cotton pickers sharing their lousy breakfast with another stranger family of Joads which was later incorporated into Chapter 22 of *The Grapes of Wrath.* "The Raid" is an account of a communist leader, older Dick and his inexperienced, undertraining and underage neophyte, Root. It is a germ story for a longer novel *In Dubious Battle* which, like the novel, portrays communist organisers' little concern for individuals and their utmost devotion to their cause.
and irreverence for religion: "You lay off that religion stuff, kid... Religion is the opium of the people" (LV, p.73). Both are good rogues, like Mac and Jim of In Dubious Battle, with their false communism. The irony is that their practice militates against their avowed principles; they hardly practice what they preach. Although Dick rebuffs Root for his religious sentimentality for quoting from the Bible, he is actually trying indirectly to be known as a martyr after his death. By pointing to the red portrait of a communist who never feared anyone he makes Root stick to the party and its rules and be beaten up.

Written in the same ironic mode as The Pastures of Heaven, the most tragic tales are "The Murder" and "The Harness". The henpecked husband Peter Randall decides to throw off the harness he was made to put on unwillingly by his wife after her death. Her death should have heralded freedom for him which he had longed for years. Now that she has gone out of his life forever, he just can not brook the idea of surviving without her. The Anglo-Saxon husband in "The Murder" whose confidence was such in his silent loyal and most obedient Yugoslavian wife that not a single syllable he would credit against her till changing one night to return unexpectedly from the journey finds her sleeping with her cousin paramour during his absence. Having rejected his father-in-law's advice of beating a wife, he has ultimately to act upon his advice; he beats Jelka and kills her cousin to save his own married life.
Based on the theme most favoured by the southwestern humorists—of tricksters manipulating things for selfish motives—Eliza Allen in "The Chrysanthemums" is greatly shocked to know about her being duped by a garrulous itinerant drinker who throws away the chrysanthemums flowers she had given him so affectionately. She is later seen sobbing and crying weakly. Mary Teller, in "The White Quail", who wants to enjoy the pleasure of her unchanging garden likes her husband only because he can afford a garden for her. For the garden's sake she has sacrificed her feminine instinct of attaining motherhood, she does not allow her husband to have an Irish terrier pup, she even hates the rough and wild hillside outside her garden hedge nor the wind that would destroy it. In spite of her best efforts she could not avoid the outside world, "all rough and tangled and unkempt" symbolised by the cat when her husband kills her favourite quail instead of the cat.

Johnny Bear, the title character of the story "Johnny Bear," like Tularcito of The Pastures of Heaven, is a half wit monster, but peaceable and harmless, proves dangerous when he acts out the secret love affairs of one of the spinster sisters, the paragon of "good people," with a Chinaman for some measure of 'whiskey'. 
"The Vigilante," "The Flight" and "The Snake" are grim stories almost devoid of humour. The last is merely a sketch based on an incident that happened in Edward Ricketts' laboratory. The ironic point is that Dr. Phillips who "could kill a thousand animals for knowledge, but not an insect for pleasure" and "hated people who made sport of natural processes" (LV, p. 53) has to kill a rat for enigmatic lady's sadistic pleasure. This futile exercise to please the lady makes painful mockery of all his beliefs and natural process. The woman's demand reverses the whole situation and ironically forces him to act contrary to his beliefs and principles he has cherished so long.

Although not as gay as Steinbeck's other stories, "The Flight" is too built on a powerful irony. Mama Torres is pleased to see her nineteen-year-old boy, Pepe—"to have a man in the house again"—ready to accept adult responsibilities. But, their hopes are ultimately frustrated when Pepe's is killed by his avengers at the time when he was greatly needed.

Based on how man's plans are often thwarted by the malignant forces working against him, are the four loosely-connected stories of *The Red Pony* which depict the stages in a boy's initiation into manhood and teach Jody, the hero of the stories, that pain, suffering and death, age and birth are the natural phenomena of life. In the first
story "The Gift" Jody's father, presents him a pony to ride and the boy eagerly awaits the day he will ride it. But before he could do so, the pony due to his own carelessness and Billy Buck's, catches cold and dies. The second story "The Mountains" begins with the return of an old paisano to Tiffin ranch to die where he was born long back. But Tiffin's unsympathetic remarks equating Gitano and the old horse, Easter, disheartens him and his hopes of dying on a ranch remain unfulfilled as he escapes with the old horse to die in the mountains.

Closely related in theme and sequence to the first story is the third story "The Promises". The father offers Jody another pony provided he tends her during gestation. Again something untoward happens and the tragedy occurs. Billy has to kill the pony to save its colt as promised to Jody.

The last story "The Leader of the People" is an account of the grandfather's old heroic feats of westering. In his being temperamentally touchy and garrulous always repeating the old uninteresting tales of his past in the most jejune manner, the grandfather is obviously a representative of poor whites as Pepe's only pleasure of throwing his dead father's knife unerringly to the wooden post likens him to the shiftless Arkansas loafers in Twain's Huckleberry Finn and Junius Maltby of The Pastures of Heaven. But the old man is greatly frustrated when he overhears his son-in-law's unkind remarks.
"Well, how many times do I have to listen to the story of the iron plates, and the thirty-five horses? That time's done. Why can't he forget it, now it's done?" He grew angrier while he talked, and his voice rose. "Why does he have to tell them over and over? He came across the plains. All right! Now it's finished. Nobody wants to hear about it over and over." (IV, p. 211).

This cruel comedy of human existence—how men's plans are thwarted and he standing helpless sees with his own eyes the shattering of his hopes and dreams—often resulting in frustration, despair, sadness, disillusionment and the 'ironic reversal of fortune' though undoubtedly compel reader's sympathy for the suffering victim, it also imparts these stories the ring of blackness of contemporary black humour.

Not only The Red Pony is episodic in structure, many of Steinbeck's other works are very loosely structured. His all structural components do not hang as tightly together as that of many twentieth century novels, steadily toward a single climax; digressions, intrusions and diversions are the qualities that make his novels disjointed and loosely structured. His earlier novel The Pastures of Heaven is too a collection of ten diverse stories of different families held together by a common locale, a common theme and an ironical vision. Each of the ten stories is independent in itself and can be read separately
without distorting its meaning and vision but the Munroe family provides the connecting thread as is trickster manifesting himself in many guises a unifying figure in Melville's *The Confidence-Man* or Huck Finn provides a physical link to the episodes of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. According to Steinbeck's own admission concerning *The Pastures of Heaven* he always thought of his novels in terms of episodes. While working on *The Pastures of Heaven* he wrote to his agent in 1931:

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 individual. They are tied together only by the common locality and by the contact with the Munroes.18

The letter obviously provides a clue for the proper understanding of his writing methods: his novels first came to him in episodes and were later embellished during the course of writing and developed into full-length books. The episodic structure of these books thus attests once again Steinbeck's debt to the earlier humorists of America, especially of the Southwestern writers, who preferred more reporting incidents and anecdotes than writing
integrated works.19

The novels of Steinbeck's early period of apprenticeship are thus folk comedy embodying tragedy, despair, futility, disillusionment, the overtones which are characteristic of black humour and Southwestern folk comedy, which was noted for its grotesque characters, deviltries of its prototypes, masculinity, rough and absurd humour of rhetoric and exaggeration. Although they are not regarded as his best novels, they were a good beginning for an "aspiring novelist," for in these works Steinbeck inaugurated and effectively demonstrates his talent and skill in creating a vital fictional form; they also set up, or rather reveal certain comic pattern of theme and design, native devices of comedy, tall tales, exaggeration, oral tradition which he employs quite consistently and more successfully on a larger scale in his later works.
NOTES


2 Walter Blair, Native American Humor, p. 167.


13 Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* p.32.

14 Steinbeck and His Critics, p.5.

15 The term is used by R.N. Watt to describe George and Lennie pair in *Of Mice and Men* in his book, Steinbeck, p. 59.

16 The term is Peter Lisca’s describing Steinbeck’s technique in *Cup of Gold* in his *The Wide World*, p.30.

17 Warren French has made this comparison between John Steinbeck’s *The Pastures of Heaven* and Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” in his book, Steinbeck (Twayne’s United States Authors series), p.40.
