CHARACTER STUDIES IN

JOHN STEINBECK'S

FICTION

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CHARACTER STUDIES IN
JOHN STEINBECK'S
FICTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the characters in John Steinbeck's fiction. Since 1929 Steinbeck has been writing and publishing books, several of which have been best sellers. Although considerable scholarship has been devoted to his works, there is still much to be done.

My first idea of a character study came from reading and appreciating The Grapes of Wrath, which contains excellent characterizations. Such creations as Ma Joad and Jim Casy are not found often in modern literature.

In analyzing the characters of Steinbeck's fiction I found that the same characters appear throughout his writing. These characters have been classified according to purpose and action in the following chapters: Children, Half-wits, The Understanding Ones, The Leaders, Women -- Good and Bad, and Men -- Young and Old. The physical appearance of the characters, the most important words spoken by the characters, and the characters' contributions to the plot make up the main body of this thesis.

Because of the absence of a standard collected edition of Steinbeck's work, I have used the editions which were available. All of Steinbeck's fiction has been used in this study.
No attempt is made to evaluate Steinbeck's ability as a literary artist. I think Steinbeck speaks for himself concerning the idea of criticism or evaluation. The following words are taken from an article by Steinbeck entitled "Critics, Critics Burning Bright," which appeared in the Saturday Review of Literature, November 11, 1950, pages 20-21.

I have fun with my work and I shall insist on continuing to have fun with it. And it has been my great good fortune in the past, as I hope it will be in the future, to find enough people to go along with me to the extent of buying books, so that I may eat and continue to have fun. I do not believe that I can much endanger or embellish the great structure of English literature.

I had a wise uncle who, coming upon me in my teens, with my chin down and shoulders bulging as I fought viciously for a highly problematical literary immortality, said as follows: "You know, if you succeed perfectly in doing what you are trying to do, the most you can hope to gain is the undying hatred of a few generations of undergraduates." Even at that age I was so impressed with his logic that I never put on the gloves with Maupassant or Proust again.

I just like to have fun with whatever equipment I have.
CHAPTER II

CHILDREN

John Steinbeck has created few child characters in his fiction; however, these few are important. His first novel, The Cup of Gold, is the story of Henry Morgan, who is an adventure seeking buccaneer. Morgan is first presented as a fifteen-year-old boy who is far more understanding and wise than his parents.

His cheek bones were high and hard, his chin firm, his upper lip short and thin like his mother's. But there, too, were the sensual underlip, and the fine nose, and the eyes which looked out on dreams; these were Old Robert's features, and his was the thick, wiry hair coiled like black springs against the head. But though there was complete indecision in Robert's face, there was a great quantity of decision in Henry's if only he could find something to decide.¹

As a young boy, Henry Morgan has the ambition of becoming a great man, and as the novel progresses he does become a famous and much feared buccaneer. In his later years Morgan loses his ambition and zest for life. Merlin, the wise man, who talks to Henry before he leaves home on his adventures, warns him against losing his child-like mind. These words of Merlin reveal Steinbeck's attitude toward, not only Henry Morgan, but many of his characters in later novels.

¹John Steinbeck, The Cup of Gold, p. 6.
'I think I understand,' he said softly. 'You are a little boy. You want the moon to drink from as a golden cup; and so, it is very likely that you will become a great man—if only you remain a little child. All the world's great have been little boys who wanted the moon; running and climbing, they sometimes caught a firefly. But if one grows to a man's mind, that mind must see that it cannot have the moon and would not want it if it could—and so, it catches no fireflies.'

The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck's second novel, is a group of stories concerning the people who live in the Pastures of Heaven. Among these people are Junius Maltby and his son, Robbie. Junius is a lazy, carefree man who has a vast knowledge of many subjects, which he passes on to his little son. When Robbie reaches school age he is forced to go to school by well meaning neighbors. The first morning Robbie trudged to school,

he was clad in 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.3

Because of his imagination and individuality, the other boys accept Robbie as their leader, and they immediately begin wearing old overalls and going barefooted. Robbie and his father remain poor and happy until the neighbors try to give the boy clothes. The teacher, Miss Morgan, tried to explain to the neighbors, "I think, you see

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2Ibid., p. 27.

why I don't think he ever knew he was poor until a
moment ago." Thus, Robbie and his father become men
at the same time; they leave the Pastures and go to
the city, where the father can give the boy the things
he should have.

This early characterization of Robbie is similar to
that of Jody in The Red Pony, published five years later.
Jody is a little boy, ten years old, with hair like
dusty yellow grass and with shy polite grey eyes, and
with a mouth that worked when he thought. He, too,
was blue chambray shirts and overalls and no shoes.
Jody is a sensitive little boy whose parents are stern
and very grown up. Jody's closest friend, next to his
ponies, is Billy Buck, a cowhand who knows everything
about horses. The little boy's first contact with death
comes when his pony dies. Jody is the one who understands
the old paisano, Cipano, when he returns to the ranch to
die. Only Jody seems to know that the old man took the
old horse and went up the mountain to die, and he is sad
from knowing this. Jody senses how hurt his grandfather
is when his father makes fun of him, and he does all he can
to relieve the old man's feelings of helplessness. The
things that Jody knows about life are not things he learned
in school; he understands life and death far more than his
parents because he has been closer to them.
Winfield, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is similar in characterization to Robbie and Jody. Winfield is a ten-year-old boy, who is "kid-wild and callish." He is dressed in ragged overalls and his face and hands are usually dirty. He is still a little boy and is more concerned with playing games and outsmarting his sister than in the problems of the family. Winfield and Ruthie's simplicity is best illustrated in the incident of their finding the indoor toilet for the first time.

Steinbeck has used a number of children paisanos in his short stories and in *Tortilla Flat*. These children illustrate Steinbeck's theory of the simplicity of children. He flaunts the children of Teresina before the psychologist and doctors. Teresina's children eat nothing but beans and tortillas; yet, they are in perfect physical condition.

Only two young girls are important enough to be named. The first of these is Martha in *To A God Unknown*. Martha is the oldest of the children in this novel, and because she is older she uses her age and seriousness as a whip on the others. When a child is being born, Martha leads the other children to a window outside the room where the birth is in process. She then has the other children lift her to the window ledge so that she can see what is happening.

The character of Ruthie, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is much like that of Martha. Ruthie also uses her age as a whip on Winfield and younger children. Ruthie likes to
be the leader or the center of attraction in all of the children's games. However, of all the child characters, Ruthie is the most developed one. She is smarter than any of the boys and has a more developed conscience than the other children in Steinbeck's fiction. When Ruthie betrays the secret about Tom Joad, she is so ashamed of her actions that Ma Joad will not permit the others to punish her.

Tularecito, in *The Pastures of Heaven*, is one of Steinbeck's first attempts at portraying the weak minded. The portrayal of the Mexican boy who searched for gnomes in the gardens of other people is in line with the characters of the other little boys.

The boy grew rapidly, but after the fifth year his brain did not grow any more. At six Tularecito could do the work of a grown man. The long fingers of his hands were more dexterous and stronger than most men's fingers. On the ranch they made use of the fingers of Tularecito. Hard knots could not long defy him. He had planting hands, tender fingers that never injured a young plant nor bruised the surfaces of a grafting limb. His merciless fingers could wring the head from a turkey gobbler without effort. Also Tularecito had an amusing gift. With his thumbnail he could carve remarkably correct animals from sandstone.

Tularecito's one talent was that of drawing, and, aside from that talent, he is a perfectly simple-minded little boy, who acts and reacts more like an animal than a

human being. When Tularecito is discovered digging for the graves, "his people," and is sent to the asylum, the reader feels that an innocent person has been dealt with unjustly.

From Steinbeck's characterizations it becomes evident that the little boys are great men so long as they remain simple and uncomplicated. The characterization of the girls, Martha and Ruthie, illustrate what happens when the child becomes smart. When the child is no longer simple, he begins to feel a conscience and a cruelty toward his fellow men that he did not have as a child.

Steinbeck's latest novel, *Burning Bright*, contains some interesting theories about the child. Throughout the play-novelette the theme of sterility is found. In the last Act, Joe Saul, who wants a child so much that his wife is willing to sin to give him one, speaks of the child.

'I know,' he said. 'I had to walk into the black to know--to know that every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father. This is not a little piece of private property, registered and fenced and separated. Nordeen! This is the Child."

Steinbeck seems to feel that the child is close to greatness because of his complete simplicity. The simplicity

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5John Steinbeck, *Burning Bright*, p. 158.
of the child gives him a knowledge and understanding that is not found in older and more experienced human beings. When the child becomes smart and begins to reason he has lost his ability to understand life and to enjoy living.
CHAPTER III

HALF-WITS

Steinbeck's first attempt at portraying a deformed character is Tularecito in *The Pastures of Heaven*.

The baby 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 named Tularecito, Little Frog, although Franklin Gomez 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."

Tularecito is a combination of deformity and wisdom; he does not have the ability to read and write and think as the other little boys. His one talent is drawing sketches of animals; the only time he becomes violent is when his sketches are destroyed. The boy reacts to punishment as an animal reacts. The young school teacher, Miss Morgan, recognizes Tularecito's talent and tries to help him.

While the people of the Pastures of Heaven did not believe in the diabolic origin of Tularecito, nevertheless they were uncomfortable in his presence. His eyes were ancient and dry; there was something troglodytic about his face. The great

1John Steinbeck, *The Pastures of Heaven*, p. 32.
strength of his body and his strange and obscure gifts set him apart from other children and made men and women uneasy.\(^2\)

Tularecito's effort to find his own people ends in tragedy, and he is sent away. The school teacher and Franklin Gomez know that Tularecito is harmless, but they cannot convince other people that the little boy was merely looking for someone to belong to when he was digging for gnomes in a neighbor's garden.

The Pirate in *Tortilla Flat* could easily be Tularecito grown up. The Pirate is described as a huge, broad man, with a tremendous black and bushy beard. The Pirate lived with his five dogs in a deserted chicken house in the yard of a deserted house on Tortilla Flat. He loved his dogs, and his only concern in life was for their happiness and well being.

There was a shrinking in the Pirate's eyes when he confronted any grown person, the secret look of an animal that would like to run away if it dared turn its back long enough. Because of this expression, the paisanos of Monterey knew that his head had not grown up with the rest of his body. They called him The Pirate because of his beard. Every day people saw him wheeling his barrow of pitchwood about the streets until he sold the load. And always in a cluster at his heels walked his five dogs.\(^3\)

Danny and his friends became interested in the mentally deranged Pirate when they discovered that he had a large sum

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)John Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat*, pp. 93-94.
of money hidden. In their efforts to find the money, they
took the Pirate and his dogs to live with them. However,
the hearts of these paisanos, who did not hesitate to
steal from each other, were touched by the simplicity of
the Pirate. When they learned that he was saving the
money to buy a gold candlestick for San Francisco de
Assisi, who had saved the life of one of his dogs, even
their under-developed consciences would not permit them
to take the Pirate’s money. The Pirate’s dream came
true when he finally had enough money for the candlestick,
and his friends sent him to church dressed in all of
their best finery. The dogs, however, could not miss
this important occasion; they also came to the church,
much to the Pirate’s embarrassment and dismay.

‘Do not be ashamed,’ Father Ramon said.
‘It is no sin to be loved by your dogs, and
no sin to love them. See how Saint Francis
loved the beasts.’ Then he told more stories
of the good saint.1

As soon as the service was ended, the Pirate rushed
to the woods with his dogs, and arranged them in two rows
as though they were in church. Then the Pirate began to
tell his dogs the stories the Priest had told about Saint
Francis.

That day his memory was inspired. The
sun found interlacements in the foliage and threw
brilliant patterns on the pine-needle carpet.

1Ibid., p. 216.
The dogs sat patiently, their eyes on the Pirate's lips. He told everything the priest had told, all the stories, all the observations. Hardly a word was out of place.

When he was done, he regarded the dogs solemnly. "Saint Francis did all that," he said.

The trees hushed their whispering. The forest was silent and enchanted.

Suddenly there was a tiny sound behind the Pirate. All the dogs looked up. The Pirate was afraid to turn his head. A long moment passed.

And then the moment was over. The dogs lowered their eyes. The tree-tops stirred to life again and the sunlight patterns moved bewilderingly.

The Pirate was so happy that his heart pained him. "Did you see him?" he cried. "Was it San Francisco? Oh! What good dogs you must be to see a vision."

The dogs leaped up at his tone. Their tunes opened and their tails thrashed joyfully.5

John Steinbeck's first successful novel, financially, was Of Mice and Men, published in 1937. This was also his first attempt at writing in play form. He spoke of the book as "an experiment in making a play that can be read or a novel that can be played...to find a new form that will take some of the techniques of both."6

Steinbeck chose as the most important character of his novel, and of his play, Of Mice and Men, a believable contemporary figure—a man who would be described on any police docket or in a detective's dossier as a sexual pervert or degenerate and in almost any psychiatrist's case history as, probably,

5Ibid., pp. 218-219.
a man afflicted with gigantism, with an
abnormally low I.Q., unusual thyroid deficiency,
excessive pituitary secretion with resulting
imbalance, a tactile fetish, psychic and/or
physical impotence, and with improperly
functioning adrenals which caused him in
moments of fear to act destructively without
intention—and Steinbeck chose to, and did,
make this monstrosity a sympathetic figure,
one whom you, if you had heart in you, would
regard with all the despair but also with all
the affection with which the giant Lennie
is regarded by his bindle-stiff guardian
and companion, the more astute and intelligent
George. 7

Lennie was,

a huge man, shapeless of face, with large,
pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and
he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little,
the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did
not swing at his sides, but hung loosely. 8

As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that Lennie
has the mind of a moron and depends on George for his
life and thoughts. Lennie, like Tularecito and the
Pirate, has an obsession for animals. However, he
becomes so thrilled and excited at petting small animals
that he crushes them to death. Lennie is completely
unresponsible for his actions, and he knows only the things
which George explains to him,

George nags and rags Lennie at times
like a distracted, exasperated harridan wife;
scocks him like a long-suffering mother whose
child is a constant worry and trial. He gives
way at times to eloquent fancies as to how much
more enjoyable, unconstrained, and livable life
would be if he were only free—if he didn't have

7 Burton Rascoe, "John Steinbeck," The English Journal,
8 John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, p. 9.
Lennie as a burden, a yoke, a ball and chain to hamper him. But as George speaks, and as his character becomes plain, you know that life would be wholly meaningless and empty for him without Lennie to take care of.
And so he has his emotional recompense in Lennie's pathetic and doglike devotion to him, a loyalty so great and so intense that Lennie's weak brain scarcely comes alive except where George is concerned—when George is angry with him, when George is planning a future for them wherein they will have a little farm of their own and won't be subject to the whims of bosses or to the seasonal variations in employment, or when harm seems to threaten George.9

Lennie's favorite past-time is to listen to George tell about their dreams.

Lennie pleaded, 'Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before.'
'You got a kick outta that, don't you? I'll tell you, and then we'll eat our supper...'

George's voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. 'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to.'

Lennie was delighted. 'That's it--that's it. How tell how it is with us.'

George went on. 'With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don't have to sit in no bar room blowin' in our jack jar because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us.'

Lennie broke in. 'But not us! An' why? Because... because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.' He laughed delightedly. 'Go on now, George!' 'You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.'

'No, you. I forget some a' the things. Tell about how it's gonna be.' 'O.K. Someday—we're gonna get the jeep together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an'a cow and some pigs and—'An' live off the fatta the lan'!' Lennie shouted. 'An' have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we're gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.'

'Why'n't you do it yourself? You know all of it.'

'No....you tell it. It ain't the same if I tell it. Go on....George. How I get to tend the rabbits.'

The dream that George and Lennie have for the future is lost when Lennie kills Curley's wife. "The utopian dream is not dead, it still functions as belief (Candy tries to carry it on, and it is still deep in Crook's mind) but for all practical purposes it has failed." George knows that he must kill Lennie to prevent his being killed by Curley and the other men.

The never-quite-realized, too often tragically shattered dreams of men toward an ideal future of security, tranquillity, ease, and contentment run like a Greek choral chant throughout the novel and

10 John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, pp. 28-30.

the play, infecting, enlivening, and ennobling not only George and Lennie but the crippled, broken-down ranch hand, Candy, and the twisted-back Negro stable back, Crooks, who begs to come in on the plan George has to buy a little farm. 12

Lennie is one of Steinbeck's best character creations; with the exception of Ma Joad, perhaps, he is the best.

You remember that Of Mice and Men was cut to the model of a play. The situation is greatly simplified, and so are the people. They are pointed up and colored so as to emphasize the characteristic—their decency where they are decent, their meanness where they are mean. The superhuman strength of the moron, his absolute devotion to his friend, the circumstances that lead to his death, make of him a character as picturesque and stagey as Hugo's hunchback of Notre Dame. Everything about the story is arranged so as to give it an effectiveness seldom found in actual life. 13

The short stories composing The Long Valley were published in 1938, a year after Of Mice and Men. Although the volume was published after Of Mice and Men, it is probably true that most of the short stories were written several years before the date of publication. The first story in this volume, "Johnny Scare," is the best illustration of the stories having been written several years before they were published. In comparing the two, it seems that

Johnny Bear is the "parent character" of Lennie. Johnny Bear is also one of the types of half-wits which Steinbeck so ably characterizes.

His name described him better than I can. He looked like a great, stupid, smiling bear. His black matted head bobbed forward and his long arms hung out as though he should have been on all fours and was only standing upright as a trick. His legs were short and bowed, ending with strange, square feet. He was dressed in dark blue denim, but his feet were bare; they didn't seem to be crippled or deformed in any way, but they were square, just as wide as they were long. He stood in the doorway, swinging his arms jerkily the way half-wits do. On his face there was a foolish happy smile. He moved forward and for all his bulk and clumsiness, he seemed to creep. He didn't move like a man, but like some prowling night animal. At the bar he stopped, his little bright eyes went about from face to face expectantly, and he asked, 'Whiskey?'

This short story, told in first person, has a Poe-like effect. Johnny Bear is more animal than human; yet he is extremely talented. He possesses the ability to pantomime and mimic human voices. Johnny Bear's talent was discovered by the customers of the Buffalo Bar, when he imitated conversations he overheard and was rewarded for his performance with whiskey. From that time on, no conversation in the village of Loma was safe from Johnny Bear's ears. He listened at windows, in the dark, behind trees—everywhere, and then repeated what he heard for whiskey. The only explanation for

Johnny Bear is given by Alex Hartnell, a citizen in the village.

Well, Blind Tom was a half-wit. He could hardly talk, but he could imitate anything he heard on the piano, long pieces. They tried him with fine musicians and he reproduced not only the music but every little personal emphasis. To catch him they made little mistakes, and he played the mistakes. He photographed the playing in the tiniest detail. The man says Johnny Bear is the same, only he can photograph words and voices. He tested Johnny with long passages in Greek and Johnny did it exactly. He doesn't know the words he's saying, he just says them. He hasn't brains enough to make anything up, so you know that what he says is what he heard.  

The plot of the story is in Johnny Bear's imitation of Slimlin and Amy Hawkins, women who have the respect of the town and are the symbols of "good people." Johnny Bear reveals that the younger sister, Amy, is going to have a baby. When he is about to reveal that the father was one of the Chinese laborers, Alex Hartnell stops the performance. The portrayal of the half-wit, Johnny Bear, is the best feature in the short story. It is evident that Lennie, of Of Mice and Men, is only a step ahead of Johnny Bear in intelligence. Their physical descriptions and animal-like natures are very similar.

A different half-wit is found in the character of Noah in The Grapes of Wrath. He has many of the same characteristics as the others.

15 Ibid., p. 150.
Behind them, moving slowly and evenly, but keeping up, came Pa and Noah—Noah the first-born, tall and strange, walking always with a wondering look on his face, calm and puzzled. He had never been angry in his life. He looked in wonder at angry people, wonder and uneasiness, as normal people look at the insane. Noah moved slowly, spoke seldom, and then so slowly that people who did not know him often thought him stupid. He was not stupid, but he was strange. He had little pride, no sexual urges. He worked and slept in a curious rhythm that nevertheless sufficed him. He was fond of his folks, but never showed it in any way. Although an observer could not have told why, Noah left the impression of being misshapen, his head or his body or his legs or his mind; but no misshapen member could be recalled. Pa thought he knew why Noah was strange, but Pa was ashamed, and never told. For on the night when Noah was born, Pa, frightened at the spreading thighs, alone in the house, and horrified at the screaming wretch his wife had become, went mad with apprehension. Using his hands, his strong fingers for forceps, he had pulled and twisted the baby. The midwife, arriving late, had found the baby's head pulled out of shape, its neck stretched, its body warped; and she had pushed the head back and molded the body with her hands. But Pa always remembered, and was ashamed. And he was kinder to Noah than to the others. In Noah's broad face, eyes too far apart, and long fragile jaw, Pa thought he saw the twisted warped skull of the baby. Noah could do all that was required of him, could read and write, could work and figure, but he didn't seem to care; there was a listlessness in him toward things people wanted and needed. He lived in a strange silent house and looked out of it through calm eyes. He was a stranger to all the world, but he was not lonely.16

The family did not try to understand Noah; they accepted him as he was. On the way to California Noah

16 John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath, pp. 95-96.
found something he had always been looking for. The family had camped on the bank of a beautiful river, and Noah had gone wading in the river. He decided that he could never leave this river. "Tom, I ain't a-gonna leave this here water. I'm a-gonna walk on down this here river." 17 Noah left the family, and was last seen by Tom as he walked slowly down the edge of the river. It is easy to imagine that Noah spent his life walking up and down the river, fishing for his food, and completely untouched by the tragedies and problems that faced the rest of the family as they went on to California.

Frankie, in Cannery Row, represents another study in the characterization of the mentally weak. Frankie was eleven years old when he began going to the Western Biological Lab to see Doc. He had very large eyes and his hair was a dark wiry dirty shock. His hands were filthy. Frankie came to the laboratory every day, and Doc found out that he wasn't wanted in school.

He couldn't learn and there was something a little wrong with his co-ordination. There was no place for him. He wasn't an idiot, he wasn't dangerous, his parents, or parent, would not pay for his keep in an institution. Frankie didn't often sleep at the laboratory but he spent his days there. And sometimes he crawled in the excelerator crate and slept. That was probably when there was a crisis at home. 18

17 Ibid., p. 284.
18 John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 59.
Frankie adored Doc, and tried very hard to do things that would please him. Doc found small jobs around the laboratory for the little boy, and he concentrated with all his heart to perform these without blundering. When Mac and the other boys at the Palace Flophouse planned the party for Doc, Frankie soon heard of it. He was determined to give Doc a beautiful gift. The black onyx clock in the window of Jacob's Jewelry Store was the gift Frankie wanted Doc to have. When he learned that he did not have the money to pay for it, he tried to steal the clock. Doc went to the police station but the judge had decided Frankie should be "put away" for reasons other than the clock.

"Yes," said Doc softly, 'I know. But maybe he had a reason." 'Frankie,' he said, 'why did you take it?'
Frankie looked a long time at him. 'I love you,' he said. 19

There are several other types of mental deficiencies represented in Steinbeck's fiction. One of the short stories in The Pastures of Heaven is about Helen Van Deventer and her daughter, Hilda. Hilda was the dangerous type of mental case whose imagination supplied all that her mind lacked. Helen Van Deventer had been born for a life of tragedy and seemingly yearned for it. It would have been a kindness for Hilda to have been separated from

19 Ibid., p. 186.
her self-sacrificing mother, but Hilda added more to her
mother's tragedy when she was with her; the mother refused to
have her committed to an institution. Suffering from halluci-
nations and a wild imagination, the girl finally killed her-
self.

Joy, in In Dubious Battle, was not a half-wit, but he
was slug-nutty. He was the veteran Communist who had been
smacked on the head so much that he was crazy. His face
was battered, his nose was crushed flat against his face,
and all of the bones in his hands had been broken. Joy was
a fanatic to the cause of Communism, and he had never been
a very rational person. He died a martyr to the cause.

In analyzing the various types of weak-minded characters
that Steinbeck portrays, several points become obvious. The
physical descriptions are similar. All of the half-wits are
strong in body and weak in mind; their hands are their chief
source of strength. Tularcito has the hands of an artist;
Lennie and Johnny Bear possess super-human strength in their
hands; the Pirate and Tuley are able workers with their hands;
Frankie, alone, does not have strength in his hands. All of
them are described as having weak eyes, which shrink from con-
tact. They walk awkwardly and heavily. Steinbeck has used
the animal to portray the weak-mindedness of the half-wits. The combination of animal and human characteristics is seen in all of the half-wits. Tularecito is compared to the coyote because of his look of savagery and wisdom. The Pirate looks and behaves like one of his own timid dogs. Lennie and Johnny Bear resemble a bear in their physical descriptions. Noah does not resemble an animal, but his whole body leaves the impression of being deformed.

Frankie, Hilda, and Joy are different types of half-wits. They are more intelligent than the animal-like ones; they are more dangerous. These three have more developed minds and bodies, but they are more likely to be mean in a smart way.

Lennie, the half-wit in Of Mice and Men, is one of Steinbeck's best character descriptions. Perhaps the reason Lennie is a good character is the combination of deformity and pity that is found in him. In spite of his weak mind, Lennie wants and tries to be good, and his efforts are pathetic. I believe the reader feels only pity for Lennie. This is his distinguishing characteristic; the other half-wits do not arouse pity for themselves.

It is interesting to notice the ends of the various types of half-wits. Tularecito and Frankie are sent to asylums. Johnny Bear's fate is uncertain, but the end of
the story leaves the impression that the people of the town will also send him to an institution. Hilda takes her own life, and Joy sacrifices himself. Lennie is killed by George, his best friend. Only the Pirate and Noah remain free. It seems proper for these two to be free because neither of them is harmful or destructive. Noah is different from the others; he is more intelligent in some ways, but he will be happier alone than with other people.

Although varying degrees of weak-mindedness are represented in Steinbeck's characters, they are much alike. They are similar in physical appearance and in action. Steinbeck has a great sympathy for these half-wits, which he passes on to his readers. He portrays them as having a deeper knowledge and understanding of life than the normal people who surround them. This inward knowledge of the half-wit comes from the complete simplicity of his mind. Steinbeck views the children and the half-wits of his fiction in much the same manner; both are good because they lack the experience or mental ability to be otherwise.

The smart, thinking characters are more likely to be evil, because they are influenced by worldly things.
Steinbeck thinks of children and half-wits as being untouched by the world, and for this reason they have a closer contact with Heaven.
CHAPTER IV

THE UNDERSTANDING ONES

An outstanding character type in much of Steinbeck's writing is found in the nature of an understanding or wise character. This particular character is the one who speaks most often for Steinbeck, and presents the author's personal views. Other characters, when they come in contact with the understanding one, are aware that he is a person who knows and understands life.

The Cup of Gold tells of the old magician, Merlin, who knew everything. When young Henry Morgan was leaving home he went to Merlin for advice, as many young men had gone to him before.

'I think I understand,' he said softly. 'You are a little boy. You want the moon to drink from as a golden cup; and so, it is very likely that you will become a great man—if only you remain a little child.'

Merlin is not mentioned again in the novel, but his advice and prophecy come true. In Steinbeck's first novel he presents Merlin as "the old wise man of Wales." This is the first characterization of a learned person, who understands all things. The characters following Merlin are more subtle; they are not called magicians. Later characters become

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1 John Steinbeck, The Cup of Gold, p. 27.
ordinary human beings, but they are also endowed with the
gifts of understanding.

In To a God Unknown, Joseph Wayne follows in Merlin's
foot-steps. Joseph was described as having a large nose and
high cheek-bones. His face seemed harder and more durable
than flesh, and his beard was black and silky. His eyes
were blue, but fierce and curious.

Perhaps because he had received the blessing,
Joseph was the unquestioned lord of the clan. On
the old farm in Vermont his father had merged the
land until he became the living symbol of the unit,
land and its inhabitants. That authority had passed
to Joseph. He spoke with the sanction of the grass,
the soil, the beasts, wild and domesticated; he was
the father of the farm.2

Joseph became a passionate worshiper of the earth, and
he willed that all things around him be fertile. The lust
for fertility became his religion, and he became a part of
nature. He was so much a part of nature that he could no
longer identify himself with man. When his younger brother
was killed, Joseph spoke these words to the oak tree, which
symbolically embodied the spirit of his father:

Now I know what the blessing was. I know what
I've taken upon me. Thomas and Burton are allowed
their likes and dislikes; only I am cut off; I am
cut off. I can have neither good luck nor bad luck.
I can have no knowledge of any good or bad. Even
a pure true feeling of the difference between pleas-
ure and pain is denied me. All things are one, and
all a part of me....Benjy is dead, and I am neither
glad nor sorry. There is no reason for it to me.

2John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p. 29.
It is just so. I know now, my father, what you were—lonely beyond feeling loneliness, calm because you had no contact.

To a God Unknown has been described by T. K. Whipple in Study Out the Land as "a strange and puzzling version of the Joseph story, full of myths and symbols and mystical identification with the earth." It is not necessary to analyze the novel, except as it reveals Joseph Wayne. The story ends with Joseph's sacrificial suicide, which brings the rain when all other methods have failed. Joseph's withdrawing from man and turning to nature is a necessary step toward becoming understanding. Joseph knew his people because he was separated from them by the land. They accepted him as their leader and respected his wisdom because he was isolated from them.

Doc Burton, of In Dubious Battle, is something of a combination of the two earlier characters. In this novel Steinbeck creates the understanding one from the experiments he made with Merlin and Joseph Wayne.

Doc Burton is a young man with golden hair. His face is delicate and almost girlish. He has large eyes that have a soft, sad look like those of a bloodhound.

\[^{3}\text{Ibid., p. 84.}\]
\[^{4}\text{John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 122.}\]
in on the strike to take care of the sanitation of the camp and to give medical aid to the strikers. Doc is a thinker and philosopher, as well as being a doctor. The men expect him to act differently and they would not have confidence in him if he were not apart from them. Mac, the Communist leader, and Jim, a new recruit to the cause, have difficulty understanding Doc Burton. He works with the Party without receiving any compensation, but he does not seem to have much faith in its doctrines. Finally, Doc explains his feelings to Mac.

'Well, you say I don't believe in the cause. That's like not believing in the moon. There've been communes before, and there will be again. But you people have an idea that if you can establish the thing, the job'll be done. Nothing stops, Mac. If you were able to put an idea into effect tomorrow; it would start changing right away. Establish a commune, and the same gradual flux will continue.'

'Then you don't think the cause is good?' Burton sighed. 'You see? We're going to pile up on that old rock again. That's why I don't like to talk very often. Listen to me, Mac. My senses aren't above reproach, but they're all I have. I want to see the whole picture— as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of "good" and "bad" and limit my vision. If I used the term "good" on a thing I'd lose my license to inspect it, because there might be bad in it. Don't you see? I want to be able to look at the whole thing.'

As the strike progresses, Doc observes the Communists in action. He tells Mac and Jim,

'There aren't any beginnings,' Burton said. 'Nor any ends. It seems to me that man has engaged in a blind and fearful struggle out of

*ibid.*, p. 143.
a past he can't remember, into a future he can't foresee nor understand. And man has met and defeated every obstacle, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself. How mankind hates itself.  

In Dubious Battle has caused considerable controversy. The story is told from the strikers' point of view, and it is obvious that John Steinbeck's sympathy is with the strikers. However, he sees the weaknesses and ignorances of the strikers even though he is sympathetic. The book is not an indication that Steinbeck is Communist; it shows that he has developed a concern for the common worker and underdog.

It is not a communist tract; it was not favorably received by the party, I believe, in spite of the highly sympathetic way in which he treats the party leaders. The ideology is somehow wrong. Too much space is given to the doctor who comes to see to the sanitary arrangements of the labor camp. The doctor is too much of a sociologist—regarding himself and his communist friends too coolly as products of force which have been at work through all history, creatures of mob sentiment, and seeing this particular fight as but an incident in a never ending struggle and perpetual balance of powers.  

Doc Burton is isolated from his companions in a manner similar to Merlin and Joseph Wayne. He is separated by the barrier of education, and by the fact that he is not a Communist. Doc leaves the impression that he is just standing off and observing the actions of the other characters.

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6 Ibid., p. 253.
7 Beach, op. cit., p. 329.
Because of his isolation, he actually sees and understands what is happening to the strikers. He is able to analyze the leaders of the strike, the strikers, and the people of the other side.

Toward the end of the novel, Doc leaves the camp and is not heard from again. He drifts out of the story with the same attitudes and ideas that he had in the beginning. Doc Burton is more realistic than Merlin or Joseph. He is more life-like and human, a quality which Steinbeck uses from this point on in characterizing the understanding one.

Steinbeck's next two novels, Of Mice and Men and The Red Pony, also contain the personification of an understanding character. The two characters, Slim and Billy Buck, are much alike.

Slim was a jerkline skinner on the ranch where Lennie and George worked; he was capable of driving sixteen or twenty mules with a single line. He was a tall man, and he had long, black hair. He walked with the grace and majesty of a craftsman; his voice was low and friendly.

There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim, the jerkline skinner. His hatchet face was ageless. He might have been thirty-five or fifty. His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow
speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought. His hands, large and lean, were as delicate in their action as those of a temple dancer.

When Slim first meets George and Lennie he recognizes their relationship as something beautiful. Slim voices the same opinions as Doc Burton concerning mankind.

'Ain't many guys travel around together,' he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'

Later when George is explaining Lennie to him,

'He's a nice fella,' said Slim. 'Guys don't need no sense to be a nice fella. Seems to me sometimes it jus' works the other way around. Take a real smart guy and he ain't hardly ever a nice fella.'

At the end of the novel when George is compelled to kill Lennie, Slim understands how he feels and tries to comfort George. In the last scene, George and Slim walk away together, probably to form a new alliance and friendship. Actually, Slim talks very little, but his actions and the respect the other men have for him reveal his character.

Billy Buck, in The Red Pony, "was a broad, bandy-legged little man with a walrus mustache, with square hands, puffed and muscled on the palms." His eyes were a watery grey, and his hair was weathered.

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8 John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, p. 62.
9 Ibid., p. 64.
10 Ibid., p. 73.
11 John Steinbeck, The Red Pony, p. 3.
Billy was a good cow-hand, and he knew just about everything there was to know about horses. He explained to Jody that horses understood what was said to them—maybe, not the words, but they got the meaning. Billy seldom said anything unless he was spoken to, but he had the manner of one who knew and understood all things. He understood Jody better than either of his parents; the understanding was a silent one, much like the understanding he had for the horses.

When Jody grieved for his horse that died, Billy Buck understood his grief, and he blamed himself for not saving the little boy's horse. He knew the little boy so well that he sacrificed the life of a good mare to give Jody the colt.

Slim and Billy Buck are alike in several ways. Their professions were similar; they both worked with animals and both were masters of their crafts. Billy knew all there was to know about horses, and Slim knew about mules. The hands of both characters were described as being skillful and graceful in caring for animals. Neither Slim nor Billy was talkative; both were understanding without words.

Jim Casy, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is Steinbeck's best example of this particular type character. He was an ex-preacher, who had lost faith in religion. When Tom first saw Casy, he was sitting under a tree singing "Yes, Sir, That's My Savior" to the tune of "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby."
Joad had moved into the imperfect shade of the molting leaves before the man heard him coming, stopped his song, and turned his head. It was a long head, bony, tight of skin, and set on a neck as stringy and muscular as a celery stalk. His eyeballs were heavy and protruding; the lids stretched to cover them, and the lids were raw and red. His cheeks were brown and shiny and hairless and his mouth full—humorous or sensual. The nose, beaked and hard, stretched the skin so tightly that the bridge showed white. There was no perspiration on the face, not even on the tall pale forehead. It was an abnormally high forehead, lined with delicate blue veins at the temples. Fully half of the face was above the eyes. His stiff gray hair was mussed back from his brow as though he had combed it back with his fingers.\textsuperscript{12}

As Jim and Casy talk and drink Jim's dollar whiskey, Casy tries to explain why he quit preaching.

'I'm glad you tol' me,' said Casy. 'I use to think it was jus' me. Finally it give me such pain I quit an' went off by myself an' give her a damn good thinkin' about.'...I says, 'Maybe it ain't a sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' the hell out of ourselves for nothin' An' I thought how some sisters took to beatin' theirselves with a three-foot shag of bobwire. An' I thought how maybe they like to hurt themselves, an' maybe I liked to hurt myself. Well, I was layin' under a tree when I figures that out, and I went to sleep. And it come night, an' it was dark when I come to. They was a coyote squawkin' near by. Before I knewed it, I was sayin' out loud, 'The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.'\textsuperscript{13}

In this first scene with Tom, Casy reveals his beliefs and ideas, and these ideas become the motivating element of the novel. In the same scene he tells Tom,

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 31.
I says, 'What's this call, this spirit?'
An' I says, 'It's love. I love people so much
I'm fit to bust, sometimes.' An' I says, 'Don't
you love Jesus?' Well, I thought an' finally I
says, 'No, I don't know nobody name' Jesus. I
know a bunch of stories, but I only love people.
An' sometimes I love 'em fit to bust, an' I want
to make 'em happy, so I been preachin' somepin
I thought would make 'em happy. An' then—I been
talkin' a hell of a lot. Maybe you wonder about
me using bad words. Well, they ain't bad to me
no more. They're just words folks use, and they
don't mean nothing bad with 'em....

I figgered about the Holy Spirit and the
Jesus road. I figgered, 'Why do we got to hang
it on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe
it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's
the Holy Spirit—the human spirit—the whole she-
bang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's
a part of.' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all
of a sudden—I knew it. I knew it so deep down
that it was true, and I still know it.'

Casy's philosophy, also that of Steinbeck in my opinion,
has been compared many times to that of Emerson and Whitman.
He realizes that there is something wrong with his religion;
when he goes off by himself he is able to see the fault.
Casy comes to the conclusion that his preaching and religion
have left man out of the picture. In his search for some-
thing to believe, he learns that the human spirit is the
Holy Spirit, and he speaks of something similar to Emerson's
"Over-soul."

The novel is a best seller. But it also has
ideas. These appear abstractly and obviously in
the interpretative interchapters. But more impor-
tant is Steinbeck's creation of Jim Casy, "the
preacher," to interpret and to embody the philosophy

14Ibid., pp. 32-33.
of the novel. And consummate is the skill with which Jim Casy's philosophy has been integrated with the action of the story, until it motivates and gives significance to the lives of Tom Joad, and Ma, and Rose of Sharon. It is not too much to say that Jim Casy's ideas determine and direct the Joads' actions.

Besides and beyond their function in the story, the ideas of John Steinbeck and Jim Casy possess a significance of their own. They continue, develop, integrate, and realize the thought of the great writers of American History. Here the mystical transcendentalism of Emerson reappears, and the earthy democracy of Whitman, and the pragmatic instrumentalism of William James and John Dewey. And these old philosophies grow and change in the book until they become new. They coalesce into an organic whole. And, finally, they find embodiment in character and action, so that they seem no longer ideas, but facts. The enduring greatness of *The Grapes of Wrath* consists in its imaginative realization of these old ideas in new and concrete forms. Jim Casy translates American philosophy into words of one syllable, and the Joads translate it into action.\(^{15}\)

Casys has very little to do with the action in the novel. He teaches his philosophy to Tom Joad, who is at the beginning a cynical ex-convict with no love for humanity or anything else. Casy makes the trip to California with the family; he has been accepted as a member of the clan. He does not talk much during the journey, but his peace of mind is an inspiration to the group, especially Tom and Ma. When Casy surrenders himself to the police, in Tom's place, his mission in the novel is completed. He knows

\(^{15}\)P. I. Carpenter, "The Philosophical Joads," *College English*, II (January, 1941), 315-316.
that Tom believes the doctorines he has taught him;
he knows that Tom is younger, stronger, and more capable
of carrying out his teachings than he. Casy's final
act of self-sacrifice confirms Tom's beliefs. From
this point on, Tom becomes the strong one and the under-
standing one. He carries Casy's spirit and philosophy
with him wherever there is need for him.

Casy is a far more progressive character than the
understanding ones before him. He, like the others,
has had to isolate himself from society to get a clear
picture. Casy becomes a different person after his
isolation. He does not voice the opinion of Slim and
Doc Burton that "mankind hates itself." However, he is
teaching that mankind must love itself, which is the
thing that Slim and Doc Burton wanted. The fact that
Casy in an ex-preacher gives him a certain amount of
authority and respect. Tom realizes Casy's greatness,
but the entire family recognizes his deep spirituality
and love for the human race. Casy is the character
whom Steinbeck strives to create in his other novels;
he is the gradual building up of all the understanding
ones. The characters following him are not as dynamic
as Casy, but they are created for the same purposes.
The Moon Is Down, published in 1942, was another of John Steinbeck's experiments with the play-novelette. This book, not one of Steinbeck's best, is the story of the German invasion of one of the small Scandinavian countries.

These are not the people that Steinbeck loves so much that he is indignant at their being pushed around, but rather people he feels he ought to love, because he is opposed to the pushing around of human beings in general. Nothing less than a major war could have aroused Steinbeck to write about a character like the Mayor of the occupied Norwegian town.15

Doctor Winter, an old man around seventy years of age, appears in the novel only four times. Yet, he symbolizes the spirit of the village, and is the mainstay of the Mayor. He is the historian and physician of the town, and he knows more about the people than anyone, even Mayor Orden. "Doctor Winter was a man so simple that only a profound man would know him as profound."17

Mayor Orden is the leader of the people; Doctor Winter gives him the strength and courage to be a good leader. Doctor Winter sees the situation more clearly

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than the others; he knows that the fight is more important than what is happening in his particular village. He is confident that the little people will not be defeated.

'I know,' said Winter, 'but they don't know.' And he went on with a thought he had been having. 'A time-minded people,' he said, 'and the time is nearly up. They think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people, and in a time of need leaders pop up among us like mushrooms.'

Orden put his hand on Winter's shoulder and he said, 'Thank you. I knew it, but it's good to hear you say it. The little people won't go under, will they?' He searched Winter's face anxiously.

And the doctor reassured him, 'Why, no, they won't. As a matter of fact, they will grow stronger with outside help.'

In the last scene Mayor Orden and Doctor Winter know that they will both be killed by the Germans, but Doctor Winter knows that the people will be stronger because of their deaths. He gives his understanding and courage to his close friend, the Mayor. The Mayor is, of course, the most important character in the novel, but he would have been nothing without his friend, the understanding one.

Cannery Row, published in 1945, contains another doctor, who is the philosopher throughout the novel.

18Ibid., pp. 175-176.
Actually, Doc is completely out of place with the inhabitants of Cannery Row; he seems to belong some where else.
However, he is as much a part of the Row as Dora Flood, the madam, or Mac and the boys at the Palace Flophouse.

Doc is the owner and operator of the Western Biological Laboratory. Doc is rather small, deceptively small, for he is wiry and very strong and when passionate anger comes on him he can be very fierce. He wears a beard and his face is half Christ and half satyr and his face tells the truth. It is said that he has helped many a girl out of one trouble and into another. Doc has the hands of a brain surgeon, and a cool warm mind. Doc tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and the dogs look up and smile at him. He can kill anything for food but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure....

Over a period of years Doc dug himself into Cannery Row to an extent not even he suspected. He became the fountain of philosophy and science and art.... Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon—and his sympathy had no warp. He could talk to children, telling them very profound things so that they understood.19

Doc's job was collecting marine life; he was happiest when he was out tramping around the country. Doc loved the country, the sea, and all of nature. In fact, Doc loved everything; he would not purposefully harm anything.

Doc knew that people would think this strange, so he did not try to explain how he felt. Mack knew that Doc

19John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, pp. 28-29.
was a lonesome man--the kind of loneliness that nothing could help.

In spite of his friendliness and his friends Doc was a lonely and a set-apart man. Mack probably notices it more than anybody. In a group, Doc seemed always alone. When the lights were on and the curtains drawn, and the Gregorian music played on the great phonograph, Mack used to look down on the laboratory from the Palace Flophouse. He knew Doc had a girl in there, but Mack used to get a dreadful feeling of loneliness out of it. Even in the dear close contact with a girl Mack felt that Doc would be lonely.20

Although Doc was lonely and apart from others, he had a great love for other people. His love and understanding of humanity was shown in many ways. No one else tried to help or understand Frankie, the mentally weak boy of the neighborhood. Doc felt a great respect for Dora Flood and her girls; he had only patience and understanding for the gang at the Palace Flophouse.

Doc said, 'Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think,' he went on, 'that Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad

20 Ibid., p. 104.
souls, but back and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else.' 

'It has always seemed strange to me,' said Doc. 'The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love to produce the second.'  

The people in Cannery Row are the kind of people John Steinbeck likes. They get drunk, and fight, and are sorry afterwards if they have done something bad. Steinbeck feels as sympathetic and understanding toward these people as does Doc. In fact, Doc probably is Steinbeck. Certainly, he expresses Steinbeck's philosophy and attitudes toward the people. Also, John Steinbeck is something of a biologist himself. He has written *Sea of Cortez* in collaboration with Edward Ricketts. This book, a journal of travel and research, is much like the work that Doc of Cannery Row was engaged in. In *Sea of Cortez* Steinbeck reflects much of the philosophy that is found in his fiction. In other words, Doc says the same thing as Casey, Slim, and the others—only the words are different.

In characterization, Doc resembles very closely Doc Burton of *In Dubious Battle*. He is detached from his surroundings and striving to "see the whole picture."

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21Ibid., pp. 148-149.
His detachment enables him to see the people of Cannery Row with the same sympathy and understanding that Doc Burton sees the strikers. However, Doc is more a part of the life of Cannery Row; everyone turns to Doc in time of trouble. Like Casey, Doc has to get close to nature before he can get close to man. Under different circumstances, Doc would have felt the same toward the strikers as Doc Burton felt.

Steinbeck's next novel, The Wayward Bus published in 1947, is another of the journey novels. The Wayward Bus, more than most of Steinbeck's novels, is a character study. All of the people on the bus are studied and classified; Steinbeck's attitude toward many types of people is presented here. There is no story to this novel; the bus breaks down, and this gives Steinbeck a chance to analyze the different personalities.

Steinbeck analyzes these characters through the eyes of Juan Chicoy, the bus driver. Of course, Juan is analyzed first; he does not say much. He listens to the others and understands them better than they understand themselves.

He was a fine, steady man, Juan Chicoy, part Mexican and part Irish, perhaps fifty years old, with clear black eyes, a good head of hair, and a dark and handsome face.22

His hands were short and wide and strong, with square fingers and nails flattened by work and grooved and twisted from having been hammered and hurt.... His black eyes were squinting and humorous, the way a man's eyes squint when he is smoking and cannot take the cigarette from his mouth. And Juan's mouth was full and good, a relaxed mouth, the underlip slightly protruding—not in petulance but in humor and self-confidence—the upper lip well formed except left of center where a deep scar was almost white against the pink tissue....

His ears were not very large, but they stood out sharply from his head like seashells, or in the position a man would hold them with his hands if he wanted to hear more clearly. Juan seemed to be listening intently all the time, while his squinting eyes seemed to laugh at what he heard, and half of his mouth disapproved. His movements were sure even when he was not doing anything that required sureness. He walked as though he were going to some exact spot. His hands moved with speed and precision and never fiddled with matches or with nails.23

Juan was an excellent mechanic, and he could make any machine work. He gave the passengers on the bus a feeling of security; they depended on him to get them through the journey safely. His wife, Alice, depended on him in the same way for her life; she could not have lived without him. Juan was not dependent on any living thing for his happiness; at first, he resented the confidence other people had in him. He wanted to leave the bus, the passengers, and his wife and return to Mexico. He confessed his thoughts to the little statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which hung over his instrument board. Juan knew that the Virgin understood how

he felt. When the bus stuck in the mud, Juan left it with
the intention of not coming back. When he was alone in the
country, he knew that he had to go back. He had decided
this before the young girl, Mildred, came to him.

Juan is the leader of the people on the bus, just as
Casy and Doc lead their people. He too was "fed-up" with
humanity until he went off by himself to figure things out.
Juan is like the other understanding ones; he is lonesome.
He is an excellent workman with his hands—a mechanic.
Juan is compelled to go back because he knows that there
is a need for him.

Steinbeck's latest novel is *Burning Bright*, published
in 1950. Before analyzing the characters, a word of
explanation concerning the book is necessary. This is
Steinbeck's third attempt to work with the form of the
play-novelette. Using this method, he presents a modern
story that has the elements of a morality play. The book
is concerned with basic human drives; love, friendship,
jealousy, and a desire for children. There are four scenes
and four characters—three of whom are men, one sterile of
body, one a close friend, and one sterile of all under-
standing. The fourth character is the young wife who
commits what is outwardly a sin, so that her husband may
have a child.
Burning Bright is a play-novelette; it can be used directly as a playscript but the story is handled descriptively. Instead of chapters, the book is divided into three acts, each one of which is set against a contrasting background. The book is not to be read, nor is the play to be seen, as a conventional or specific plot with conventional or specific characters. The story, for example, is not to be regarded a tragedy because one of the central characters is murdered. The murder is non-violent in its symbolic presentation. In fact, the characters, story, and setting are used as part of a symbolic whole.\textsuperscript{24}

Friend Ed is described as being broader and taller than Joe Saul. He is slow in his motions and speech; he is dressed as a clown in the first act.\textsuperscript{25} Friend Ed is the understanding one of this novel; he knows that his friend is in trouble and wants to help him.

Friend Ed spoke quietly. 'I'll take some of the itch from you, if you'll let me. I held you weeping when your Cathy died. I lifted Cousin Will off the ring rim, and I stood left hand to you with Mordeen. I think I know your sickness but you will have to say it first, Joe Saul.'\textsuperscript{26}

Friend Ed does the same things for Joe Saul that Casy does for Tom Joad and that Doctor Winter does for Mayor Orden. He gives Joe Saul his understanding and philosophy. Friend Ed knows that Victor is the father of Mordeen's child, and he

\textsuperscript{24}Norman Cousins, "Hemingway and Steinbeck," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII (October 28, 1950), 25-27.

\textsuperscript{25}John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., pp. 24-25.
understands that Mordeen committed this act, which was repulsive to her, out of her love for her husband. Friend Ed kills Victor because he thinks this act will save Joe Saul, but Joe Saul has learned that he is sterile and that the child can not be his.

'I do understand. I understand that you are offered a loveliness and you vomit on it, that you have the gift of love given you such as few men have ever known and you throw on it the acid of your pride, your ugly twisted sense of importance.'

'Friend Ed, Friend Ed, don't you understand? It's not my child, it can't be.'

'It is your child. More than you can conceive in your sick soul. Soul? I wonder what your soul looks like. I think I know—it looks like those dead shrunken sperm.'

Friend Ed makes one last effort to help Joe Saul understand that the child is his in a spiritual way, if not physically.

'I've given you everything a friend can give, Joe Saul—even contempt, and that's the hardest thing of all. Killing is easy compared to that.' And he said, 'You didn't hear what I had to say. I'm sailing at midnight. I've done everything I can—everything. Now you will be all alone on your particular dark ocean. Maybe your soul will require the destruction of everything beautiful around it for its small integrity. But I always thought it might be a braver soul than that, Joe Saul. It is so easy a thing to give—only great men have the courage and courtesy and, yes, the generosity to receive.'

27Ibid., p. 147.

28Ibid., p. 149.
The understanding that Friend Ed has is the same understanding that Casy has. Casy preaches love of humanity to the Joads and Friend Ed does the same for Joe Saul.

'I could wish that you would know and understand that you are the husband and the father of love. The gift you have received is beyond the furthest hope of most men. It's not that you should try to excuse or explain. You should—you must—search in your dark crippled self for the goodness and the generosity to receive.'

As Norman Cousins has stated, Steinbeck does not attempt to give individuality to the characters of his novel. However, the character of Friend Ed, the understanding one, is universal as far as Steinbeck is concerned. Friend Ed observes, understands, and translates life for Joe Saul. Without Friend Ed's help, Joe Saul would not have accepted the child. Joe Saul says, "Every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father," but Friend Ed has known this from the beginning. Here, again, is Walt Whitman's philosophy expounded by a Steinbeck character. Friend Ed's purpose in the novel is to give Joe Saul the love for the human spirit, which he possesses. The same transference of love and understanding occurs between Casy and Tom Joad.

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29 Ibid., p. 150.
30 Ibid., p. 158.
It is, perhaps, only a coincidence that Steinbeck's close friend is named Ed. (Ed Hickett— with whom he collaborated to write *Sea of Cortez*). Also, *Burning Bright* was written at a time when Steinbeck was ending one marriage and beginning a new one.

This chapter has been an attempt to show that most of Steinbeck's novels have a character who is superior to the other characters in understanding and in love for mankind. This character shows a steady growth from Merlin to Casy; Casy is the masterpiece. There is a building-up to Casy, and the characters after him are created from his pattern.

It is interesting to notice the professions of the understanding ones. There is one magician, Merlin; there are three characters who are skilled in the art of animal husbandry—Joseph Wayne, Slim, and Silly Suck. Doc Burton, Doctor Winter, and Doc of Cannery Row are in the medical or biological profession. Casy is an ex-preacher; Juan Chicoy is a master mechanic. Friend Ed, who represents universality, is skillful in the air, on the land, and on water. With the exception of Casy, all of these characters live by the work of their hands. This indicates
that Steinbeck places greatest confidence in those who are practical, those who live close to nature and work with their hands. Each of these characters is a master of his own craft.

Marlin, Doc Burton, and Friend Ed drift out of their respective novels when their work is finished. Slim, Billy Buck, Doc of Cannery Row, and Juan Chicoy remain in the novels; they remain with the attitude that someone else may need their help and understanding. Joseph Wayne, Casey, and Doctor Winter die; each of their deaths is a self-sacrifice. Their deaths give courage and understanding to some other character. Each of these characters meets the fate that will best illustrate his love for humanity.

All of these are lonely men; they are lonely because they understand things that no one else can understand. They are lonely because they are "viewing the whole picture," while other characters see only what is happening to their particular world. The understanding ones have had to isolate themselves in order that they may see clearly. However, they are not lonely to the point of being selfish; their loneliness is a result of understanding what others can not even see. They are the most un-selfish
characters that Steinbeck has created; they give as much of themselves to their friends as their friends will accept. These characters love and understand the "human spirit."
CHAPTER V

THE LEADERS

Another outstanding character type that is prominent in John Steinbeck's fiction is the leader. In many instances the leader and the understanding one are found together, and the leader becomes a disciple to the understanding one. In these cases there is an indication that the leader will develop the understanding of his teacher, and will, eventually, take on the characteristics of the understanding one. However, the leaders are not always influenced by others; often they are created for the sole purpose of leading their people.

_Tortilla Flat_ is a novel apart from the other works of Steinbeck; it has been a puzzle to critics. The story of Danny and his friends is not an easy one to analyze. The most revealing facts about this novel come from Steinbeck himself.

The book has a very definite theme. I thought it was clear enough. I had expected that the plan of the Arthurian cycle would be recognised. Even the incident of the Sangreal in the search of the forest is not clear enough, I guess. The form is that of the Malory version—the coming of Arthur, and the mystic quality of owning a house, the forming of the Round Table, the adventures of the knights and finally, the mystical translation of Danny. The main issue was to present a little known and to me delightful people.\(^1\)

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\(^1\)Gannett, _op. cit._, p. 13.
Critics may continue to argue about the book; the point that is to be made here is an obvious one. Danny is the leader of his friends; all of the action in the novel is centered around Danny. His house represents the Round Table and his friends are the knights; Danny is the ruler of the Round Table.

Danny was a paisano, and he grew up in Tortilla Flat and every one liked him, but he did not stand out particularly from the screeching children of Tortilla Flat. He was related to nearly everyone in the Flat by blood or romance. His grandfather was an important man who owned two small houses in Tortilla Flat and was respected for his wealth. If the growing Danny preferred to sleep in the forest, to work on ranches and to wrest his food and wine from an unwilling world, it was not because he did not have influential relatives. Danny was small and dark and intent. At twenty-five his legs were bent to the exact curves of a horse's sides.2

After Danny had been in the army, he returned to Tortilla Flat and learned that he was a rich man; the grandfather had died and left Danny the houses. Danny, weighed down with the responsibility of ownership, offered his home and good fortune to his friends. In this manner, the Round Table was formed. Danny was like the other paisanos, but he was their ideal. He could drink more wine, love more women, and fight more battles than the others. Everyone in Tortilla Flat knew that Danny was the leader; there was no doubt among his seven house guests. The friends respected Danny because he was a property owner, but he would have been their leader without the houses.

Danny's mystical death brings to an end the adventures of the paisano-knights. With his death, the cycle is broken, and

2. J. Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, pp. 11-12.
each of the friends goes a different direction, Danny did not strive to lead his friends in any particular path or for any particular purpose. He was the leader, but he did the things that brought the most pleasure to himself and to his friends.

Perhaps, Danny can not be compared to other characters, because *Tortilla Flat* can not be compared to other books. However, here is an undisputed leader; for without Danny the group fell apart. This ability to lead others is as evident in Danny as it is in other characters of different type novels.

The next novel, *In Dubious Battle*, offers an excellent study of the leader type. There are two leaders in the novel, but they are the same character. Mac McLeod is the Communist leader of the field workers; he does all of the planning and organizing for the strike. Jim Nolan, the new convert to the Party, takes up the job where Mac leaves off. Jim is the more developed side of Mac's character.

Mac has the face of a scholarly prizefighter; he is a large man with broad shoulders and long arms. Mac has had much experience as a fieldworker for the Communists. He does not expound the doctrines of Communism, but he does practice them as far as the novel is concerned. It is his duty to arouse the workers, create discontent, and prod the strike along. Mac is very capable at doing these things.

At times it seems doubtful that Mac is Communist. He does not refer to the policies or teachings of the Party. He is interested in helping the workers better their conditions.
He seems too interested in the men as a group to be concerned with the men as a group of Communists.

'Sure they like it. Men always like to work together. There's a hunger in men to work together. Do you know that ten men can lift nearly twelve times as big a load as one man can? It only takes a little spark to get them going. Most of the time they're suspicious, because every time someone gets working in a group the profit of their work is taken away from them; but wait until they get working for themselves.'

Mac is ready to use all tricks to start the strike and to keep it going. He does not permit himself or Jim to be soft-hearted. He says, "Don't you go liking people, Jim. We can't waste time liking people." Mac does not allow his personal feelings to interfere with his work. When he uses Joy's corpse to arouse the men, Mac tells Joe Burton,

'If you get lost in a lot of sentimental foolishness. There's an end to be gained; it's a real end, hasn't anything to do with people losing respect. It's people getting bread into their guts. It's real, not any of your high-falutin ideas.'

When Jim Nolan enters the Party, he has a definite purpose for doing so. "Well--I could give you a lot of little reasons. Mainly, it's this: My whole family has been ruined by this system." Jim goes into this work because he has lost his family, job, and self-respect; he blames these losses on the Capitalistic system. Jim is looking for something to

3J. Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 61.
4Ibid., p. 115. 5Ibid., p. 201. 6Ibid., p. 7.
believe in and to work for; he finds it. He learns a great deal by watching Mac from day to day. As the strike progresses, Jim progresses too. He begins to see beyond this immediate strike, and he thinks that the only important thing in the world is for the fight to be carried on.

Jim is one of Steinbeck's ordinary, good-hearted lads who could appropriately be off chasing frogs and getting drunk with the boys in Cannery Row, but he has been caught in the squeeze of his economic environment. His family has been knocked to pieces in the struggle to stay alive and he is sore enough to want to hit back. The fruit picker's strike which he helps organize is to be his initiation in the techniques of the active radical. He is not sure that he will be any good at it; the thing represents to him mostly a way of life that he wants to try.7

Where Mac's character ceases, Jim's begins, or the two become the same character fused together. Jim is the more mystical side of Mac. Mac has laid the frame-work and planned the strike, but he weakens because he becomes attached to Jim. From there on Jim is the leader.

Mac looked at him with something of fear in his eyes. 'You're getting beyond me, Jim. I'm getting scared of you. I've seen men like you before. I'm scared of 'em. Jesus, Jim, I can see you changing every day. I know you're right. Cold thought to fight madness, I know all that. God Almighty, Jim, it's not human. I'm scared of you.'

Jim said softly, 'I wanted you to use me. You wouldn't because you got to like me too well.' He stood up and walked to a box and sat down on it. 'That was wrong. Then I got hurt. And sitting here waiting, I got to know my power, I'm stronger than you, Mac. I'm stronger than

7Frohock, op. cit., p. 158.
anything in the world, because I'm going in a straight line. You and all the rest have to think of women and tobacco and liquor and keeping warm and fed.' His eyes were as cold as wet river stones. 'I wanted to be used. Now I'll use myself and you. I tell you, I feel there's strength in me.'

Mac realizes that Jim has gained strength of character during the strike. Mac, in spite of his own warnings, becomes attached to Jim. As the show-down comes and the strike is going to be broken up, Mac tries to persuade Jim to leave. He tells Jim that he is too valuable to be lost in a small strike. Jim senses Mac's affection for him, and he refuses to leave. Jim feels that the men must fight, and he thinks that he can find a way to make them fight. The way, of course, is Jim's death. When Jim and Mac walk into a trap, Jim's face is shot off. This is the way Jim wants to die; it is much like the death of Joy, the slug-nutty radical. The novel ends just as Mac places Jim's body before the men and begins his speech. In this manner, Jim has supplied what is needed to make the men fight.

Steinbeck's short story "The Raid," from The Long Valley, contains the same characters as Mac and Jim. The theme of the short story, which was probably written before the novel, is the same. Dick, the experienced Party member, gives courage and strength to Root, the new member. At the same time that Dick gives courage to Root he is also receiving courage and

8J. Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 274.
inspiration from him. The same thing is true of Jim and Mac; the relationship between Tom and Casey is the same type. The other novels do not contain two leaders who are working for the same purposes. Actually, Jim and Mac are the same character; Jim is an extension to Mac's character and personality.

George, in Of Mice and Men, is the next leader characterized by Steinbeck. George is the protector and guardian of the half-wit, Lennie. He is a small man with restless eyes and strong features. "Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose." George is deeply attached to Lennie; he realizes that Lennie would be helpless without him. There are many things that Lennie keeps George from doing, but George would be lost without Lennie's devotion and friendship. George's purpose in life is to provide protection and security for Lennie. It is George's dream that Lennie always wants to hear, and both of them plan and work so that the dream may come true.

'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to...

O.K. Someday—we're gonna get the jock together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and—'

'Well,' said George, 'we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hatch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up

9 J. Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, p. 9.
a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen
to the rain comin' down on the roof—Nuts!' 10

George feels a great responsibility for Lennie. He
explains this to Slim. At one time he had made fun of Lennie
and had caused him to almost drown. When Lennie's Aunt Clara
died, Lennie just "took up" with George. George did all of
the thinking for Lennie.

George spoke proudly. 'Jus' tell Lennie what
to do an' he'll do it if it don't take no figuring.
He can't think of nothing to do himself, but he sure
can take orders.' 11

Throughout the novel, George does the talking and thinking
for Lennie. He knows that Lennie will get in trouble, as he
has done previously, if he talks too much. In fact, George
thinks for Lennie in much the same manner that Mac thinks for
the strikers. George leads Lennie and wants the same things
for him that Mac and Jim want for their followers.

On the symbolic level, Of Mice and Men is backward-
looking, to Steinbeck's rejection of social formulas.
Symbolically, it deals with the attempt of George, who
seems to be Steinbeck's type for the radical, to lead
Lennie, a symbol of the masses to a utopia. George
has the same faith in his ability to lead Lennie
that Steinbeck attributes to his radicals leading
the masses. 12

George can be compared to the other leaders. He is willing
to sacrifice his own pleasure to take care of Lennie; Mac and
Jim are willing to sacrifice their lives for the strikers—

10 Ibid., pp. 28-30. 11 Ibid., p. 70
12 Hyman, op. cit., p. 193.
rather the strike. George forms a friendship with Slim, and Slim gives George courage and understanding. In different circumstances, George would have been as ardent in the fight for the strikers as he was in his loyalty to Lennie.

Tom Joad, in The Grapes of Wrath, is the same character as George and Mac. Like Jim, of In Dubious Battle, he shows much growth as the novel progresses.

He was not over thirty. His eyes were very dark brown and there was a hint of brown pigment in his eyeballs. His cheek bones were high and wide, and strong deep lines cut down his cheeks, in curves beside his mouth. His upper lip was long, and, since his teeth protruded, the lips stretched to cover them, for this man kept his lips closed. His hands were hard, with broad fingers and nails as thick and ridged as little clam shells. The space between thumb and forefinger and the hams of his hands were shiny with callus.13

Tom Joad, who has been just released from prison, seems cynical and bitter in the beginning of the novel. He leaves the impression of not caring for anything, but as the story develops Tom changes. From the moment that he meets the ex-preacher, Jim Casey, he begins changing. Tom has respect for Casey because he was once a preacher. As Tom listens and observes Casey, he realizes that Casey is preaching a new kind of religion—a religion that he can believe in. Tom tries to explain how he feels about being in prison for four years.

"The thing that gave me the mos' trouble was, it didn't make no sense. You don't look for no sense when lightnin' kills a cow, or it

comes up a flood. That's just the way things is. But when a bunch of men take an' look you up for four years, it ought to have some meaning. Men is supposed to think things out. Here they put me in, an' keep me an' feed me four years. That ought to either make me so I won't do her again or else punish me so I'll be afraid to do her again—he paused—but if Herb or anybody else come for me, I'd do her before I could figure her out. Specially if I was drunk. That sort of senselessness kind a worries a man.'14

Tom is a good target for Casey's teachings. He has a negative attitude toward life; he does not try to make sense out of anything. He is very open for Casey's philosophy because he does not have one of his own. Tom is deeply impressed with Casey during their first conversations; he probably is most impressed by the fact that Casey has given up preaching. Tom knows that Casey has done a lot of thinking on his own, and because he has stopped calling himself a preacher he is more valuable to Tom. Tom explains Casey to the family.

'I'd like to say—well, that preacher—he wants to go along.' He was silent. His words lay in the group, and the group was silent. 'He's a nice fella,' Tom added. 'We've knewed him a long time. Takes a little wild sometimes, but he talks sensible.'15

As the family starts the trip to California, Tom is still confused in his thinking. He sees that there are many things wrong with a world where hundreds of families are forced to leave their homes. Tom does not want to inspect these things

14 Ibid., p. 74.
15 Ibid., p. 138.
too closely; he is afraid of what he will learn. He says, "I ruther jus'—lay one foot down in front a the other."\textsuperscript{16} Tom grows stronger and wiser with each incident along the road. He is beginning to see the trip as more than just a journey across the country to get work. He sees the family and the incidents on the road through the eyes of Casy. When the family finally reaches California, Tom is beginning to accept his roll as the leader. The entire family has depended on him to see them safely through the trip, and Ma Joad sees clearer than the others what is happening to Tom.

By virtue of his wholehearted participation in this new group the individual may become greater than himself. Some men, of course, will remain mere individuals, but in every group there must be leaders, or 'representative men.'...Because he has been an individualist, but through the influence of Casy and of his group idea he has become more than himself; Tom becomes 'a leader of the people.' But his strength derives from his increased sense of participation in the group.\textsuperscript{17}

Casy's sacrifice for Tom and the family, is the final factor in making Tom the leader. After Casy is gone, Tom understands why he was willing to die for the others. Tom realizes the things that Casy believed in, and he knows that they are true. Casy's death forces Tom to face the realities which he tried to avoid. He sees that the fight is more than the trials and tribulations of his family; he knows that it is a fight for all mankind.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 236.

\textsuperscript{17} Carpenter, op. cit., p. 319.
After Casy is killed, and Tom revenges his death, the family is compelled to move on, with Tom in hiding. The family reaches a new camp, and Tom hides in the bushes of a nearby stream. Tom's hours spent in the brush and thickets are comparable to Casy's experience in the wilderness of Oklahoma. It is here that Tom reaches Casy's philosophy and expresses it in his own words. When Ma Joad slips away to see Tom for the last time, he tells her his mission in life.

"Me, she said, 'Lookie, Ma, I been all day an' all night hidin' alone. Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used to bother me. But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remem-ber—all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he found he didn't have no soul that was his'n. Says he found he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Did'nt think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't no good alone.'

"He was a good man," Ma said.

"Tom went on, 'He quoted out some scripture once, an' it didn' sound like no hell fire scripture. He tol' it quiet, an' I remember it. Says it's from the Preacher.'

"How's it go, Tom?"

"Goos, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." That's part of her.'

"Go on, Ma said. 'Go on, Tom.'

"Just a little bit more. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

"An' that's Scripture!"

"Casy said it was. Called it the Preacher."
'Hush--listen.'

'Only the wind, Ma. I know the wind.
An' I got to thinkin', Ma--most of the preachin'
is about the poor we shall have always with us,
an' if you got nothin', why, jus' fol' your hands
an' to hell with it, you gonna git ice cream on
gol' plates when you're dead. An' then this here
Preacher says two get a better reward for their
work.'

'Tom,' she said. 'What you amin' to do?'

He was quiet for a long time. 'I been thinkin'
how it was in that gov'ment camp, how our folks
took care a theirselves, an' if they was a fight
they fixed it theirselves; an' they wasn't no cops
waggin' their guns, but they was better order
than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin'
why we can't do that all over. Throw out the cops
that ain't our people. All work together for our
own thing--all farm our own lan'.'

'Tom,' Ma repeated, 'what you gonna do?'

'What Casey done,' he said.

'But they killed him.'

'Yeah,' said Tom. 'He didn' duck quick enough.
He wasn' doing nothin' against the law, Ma. I
been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our
people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan'
layin' fallow, or maybe one fellas with a million
acres, while a hundred thousand good farmers is
starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks
got together an' yelled, like them fellas yelled,
only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch--'

Ma said, 'Tom, they'll drive you, an' cut
you down like they done to young Floyd.'

'They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin'
all our people.'

'You don't aim to kill nobody, Tom?'

'No, I been thinkin', long as I'm a outlaw
anyways, maybe I could--Hell, I ain't thought it
clear, Ma. Don' worry me.'

They sat silent in the coal-black cave
of vines. Ma said, 'How'm I gonna know 'bout
you? They might hurt ya. How'm I gonna know?'
Tom laughed uneasily, 'Well, maybe like
Casey says, a fellas ain't got a soul of his own,
but only a piece of a big one--an' then--'

'Then what, Tom?'

'IThen it don' matter. Then I'll be all
a run' in the dark. I'll be ever'where--where-
ever you look. Wherever they's a fight so
hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever
they're a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casey knew, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'-I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build--why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casey. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.'10

Tom Joad, like Jim and the others, would have been a happy, carefree person; by his own testimony he was interested in women, the land, and pleasure. Circumstances and Casey prevented Tom from ever being like the others; he was a leader.

Tom, like the others, was a capable and hard worker; he was a very good mechanic. In physical description he resembled Jim of In Dubious Battle. Tom is the best example of Steinbeck's characterization of a leader. Perhaps, he is the best example because the reader sees Tom's character grow. He comes closer to being like the understanding one than any of the other leaders; Tom is very close to Casey in spirit and understanding. This ability to understand, combined with his ability to lead, makes Tom the strongest character of this type.

Mayor Orden, in The Moon Is Down, is representative of the leader type character. The Mayor is an old man, and he has been Mayor for a long time. To the people in the small village the Mayor represents their spirit of freedom, and Mayor Orden understands his people.

He was dressed in his official morning coat, with his chain of office about his neck. He had a large, white, spraying mustache and two smaller ones, one over each eye. His white hair was so recently brushed that only now were the hairs struggling to be free, to stand up again. He had been Mayor so long that he was the Idea-Mayor in the town. Even grown people when they saw the word 'mayor,' printed or written, saw Mayor Orden in their minds. He and his office were one. It had given him dignity and he had given it warmth. 19

Mayor Orden was a peaceful man, as the entire village was peaceful, but when it was necessary to lead his people against the invaders he was the first person who recognized what had to be done.

'This is no honorable war. This is a war of treachery and murder. Let us use the methods that have been used on us! Let the British bombers drop their big bombs on the works, but let them also drop us little bombs to use, to hide, to slip under the rails, under tanks. Then we will be armed, secretly armed. Then the invader will never know which of us is armed. Let the bombers bring us simple weapons. We will know how to use them!' 20

Mayor Orden is not the strong leader that Steinbeck has created in his labor leaders. He is a passive person; his leadership stems from the great respect the people hold for him. Yet, he is similar to the other leaders in one aspect—the most important aspect. He is ready to die for his people. He confesses that he is afraid, and he is strengthened by his friend, Doctor Winter. But when the moment comes for him to die, he does it bravely and in a way that will make his people

20 Ibid., p. 142.
proud. Orden is not a particularly strong leader because there has been no reason for leadership in this quiet little village. When the invasion comes he rises as leader with all the strength that his age and office will permit. Rather than being an active leader to his people, Mayor Orden is a symbol of leadership.

In The Mayward Bus there is no leader; the plot of the novel does not require one. However, in Ernest Horton, the young salesman, there is a hint at leadership. His cynicism is similar to that of Jim Nolan and Tom Joad when they are casting about for something to believe in. Horton is an ex-S.I. who is very much confused with the world that he finds when he gets out of service. His cynical attitude appears when he is talking to Mr. Fritchard, the typical businessman.

'I wonder,' Ernest said. 'I've even tried to figure it out. My old man had two faiths. One was that honesty got rewarded some way or other. He thought that if a man was honest he somehow got along, and he thought if a man worked hard and saved he could pile up a little money and feel safe. Teapot Dome and a lot of stuff like that fixed him on the first, and nineteen-thirty fixed him on the other. He found out that the most admired people weren't honest at all. And he died wondering, a kind of awful wondering, because the two things he believed in didn't work out—honesty and thrift. It kind of struck me that nobody has put anything in place of those two.'

Mr. Fritchard shook this out of his head. 'You can't be thrifty because of taxes,' he said. 'There was a time when a man could build up an estate, but now he can't. Taxes take it all. You're just working for the government. I tell you, it knocks initiative on the head. No one has any ambition any more.'

'It don't make a lot of difference who you work for if you believe in it,' said Ernest. 'The government or anybody else.'
Mr. Critchard interrupted him. 'The returning soldiers,' he said, 'they're the ones I'm worrying about. They don't want to settle down and go to work. They think the government owes them a living for life and we can't afford it.'

Ernest's forehead was beaded with perspiration now, and there was a white line around his mouth and a sick look in his eyes. 'I was in it,' he said softly. 'Ho, no, don't worry. I'm not going to tell you about it. I wouldn't do that. I don't want to.'

Mr. Critchard said, 'Of course, I've got the greatest respect for our soldiers, and I think they should have a voice.'

Ernest's fingers crept to his lapel buttonhole. 'Sure,' he said, 'sure, I know.' He spoke as though he addressed a child. 'I read in the papers about our best men. They must be our best men 'cause they got the biggest jobs. I read what they say and do, and I've got a lot of friends that you might call bums, and there's awful little difference between them. I've heard some of the bums get off stuff that sounded even better than the stuff that the Secretary of State gets off. Oh, what the hell!' He laughed. 'I've got an invention, and it's a rubber drum that you beat with a sponge. It's for the drunks that want to play tramps in the orchestra. I'm going to take a little walk.'

'You're nervous,' said Mr. Critchard. 

'Yeah, I'm nervous,' Ernest said. 'Everybody's nervous. And I'll tell you something. If we've got to fight somebody again, you know what's the most awful thing? I'll go too. That's the most awful thing.' And he got up and walked away.

Ernest Burton is not a leader in this novel, but his ideas and actions suggest that he may find the same solution to his problems as Jim Nolan and Tom Joad.

Another suggestion of a leader is found in Mack of Cannery Row. There is not much leadership involved in this novel; Mack and a group of his friends lived in the Palace Flophouse. The

Flophouse was an old building which had been used to store fishmeal before Mack and his friends moved in. The friends were happy in their home; they worked when they needed money, and the rest of the time they enjoyed life.

Mack was the elder, leader, mentor, and to a small extent the exploiter of a little group of men who had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink and contentment. But whereas most men in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their targets, Mack and his friends approached contentment casually, quietly, and absorbed it gently.

Mack was the spokesman for the group when speaking was necessary, and he made the arrangements for the others to find jobs. He speaks the philosophy of the group at the Palace Flophouse when the boys are trying to raise money for Doc's party.

'No,' said Mack quickly. 'We got good reputations and we don't want to spoil them. Everyone of us keep a job for a month or more when we take one. That's why we can always get a job when we need one. I'pose we take a job for a day or so—why we'll lose our reputation for sticking. Then if we needed a job there wouldn't nobody have us.' The rest nodded quick agreement.22

There is a great resemblance in the Palace Flophouse and Danny's house. Mack has the same power and authority as Danny. The inhabitants of Cannery Row are the same as those of Tortilla Flat, only the paisano blood is missing. The Palace Flophouse

22 J. Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 10.
23 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
could just as likely be the Round Table as Danny's home. The theme of the two books is very similar. There is no Joe in Tortilla Flat, but if he had been there his observations and philosophy would not have undergone any changes.

The main character of Burning Bright is Joe Saul. In the discussion of Belden (Chapter III) the universality of the plot and characters of this novel has been discussed. Joe Saul represents a universal type in characterization; he appears as a circus performer, a farmer, and a mariner. Joe Saul is not a leader in the same sense that preceding characters have been leaders. However, he symbolizes the attitudes toward his fellow men that are necessary for a true leader.

In physical description Joe Saul resembles the radical leaders of Steinbeck's fiction; he is much like Jack of In Dubious Battle in appearance and age.

A lithe and stringy man of middle age, Joe Saul. His jaws muscled against strain and aches down the sides of his neck. His arms were white and blue-veined, with the long cords of clinging and hanging rather than the lumps of lifting. His hands were white, the fingers spatalate, and palms and fingers calloused from the rope and bar. Joe Saul's face was rough and a little pock-marked; his eyes looked large and dark and glittering within their penciled edges. 24

Joe Saul's great fear in the novel is sterility. He is afraid of not having a child to carry on his name.

Joe Saul cried, 'A man can't scrap his blood line, can't stop the thread of his immortality. There's more than just my memory. More than my

24 J. Steinbeck, Burning Bright, p. 18.
training and the remembered stories of glory and the
forgotten shame of failure. There's a trust imposed
to hand my line over to another, to place it ten-
derly like a thrush's egg in my child's hand. You've
given your blood line to the twins, Friend Ed. And
now--three years with Mordeen.\footnote{Ibid., p. 29.}

Actually, what Joe Saul is seeking is immortality, and
he feels that the continuation of his own blood and body will
grant him this immortality. When Joe Saul says, "There's a
trust imposed to hand my line over to another," he is speaking
for universal man. With the help of Friend Ed, Joe Saul dis-
cards his egotism and sees that there is a trust imposed toward
all men, not just his child. In the same manner, the other
leaders have had to forget their egos and personal desires, and
think in terms of humanity.

Joe Saul, in Burning Bright, becomes this real
human being. He discovers that love has higher
dimensions than he had realized, and that identi-
fication with the human family is purpose and ful-
fillment in life. He can look at a child--any
child--and feel the pride of a father relationship.
He has, in short, broken through the limitations
of mechanical masculinity. What he eats, whom
he sleeps with, and how he punches are of less
consequence than what he does to justify the gift
of compassion and conscience.\footnote{Cousins, op. cit., p. 26.}

When Joe Saul does accept another man's child for his
own, he has reached the same point as Casy and Tom Joad in their
search for something to believe in. Joe Saul understands that his
own blood and immortality are unimportant except in their
relationship to that of all men; he expresses Casy's belief of "one big soul and everybody's got a part of it."

'I thought my blood must survive—is alive—but it's not so. My knowledge, yes—the long knowledge remembered, repeated, the pride and warmth, Mordean, warmth and companionship and love so that the loneliness we wear like icy clothes is not always there. These I can give.'

'Where is your face?' she asked. 'That's happened to your face, Joe Saul?'

'It's not important. Just a face. The eyes, the nose, the shape of chin—I thought they were worth preserving because they were mine. It is not so.

It is the race, the species that must go staggering on, Mordean, our ugly little species, weak and ugly, torn with insanities, violent and quarrelsome, sensing evil—the only species that knows evil and practices it—the only one that senses cleanliness and is dirty, that knows about cruelty and is unbearably cruel.'

In the concluding lines of the novel, Joe Saul tells of the great truth that he has learned from his sterility. He is saying that all human beings are immortal, and that each being is responsible for and related to all others.

'I know,' he said, 'I had to walk into the black to know—to know that every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father. This is not a little piece of private property, registered and fenced and separated. Mordean! This is the Child.'

It seems evident that Jim Casy is not the only Steinbeck character that preaches Walt Whitman. Perhaps, the theme and characterization of Burning Bright are too universal to classify in this method. Yet, Joe Saul has discovered that humanity as

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28Ibid., p. 156.
a whole, not just one individual man, is what matters most in the world. This interest in humanity and the desire to help mankind is essential to all of Steinbeck's leaders. In the other novels the leaders have viewed humanity through their own people; Joe Saul speaks universally and for all people.

In summing up the leader-type, there are several conclusions to be drawn. First, there are types within the type. Danny, of Tortilla Flat, and Jack of Cannery Row, are leaders by natural instinct. They are leaders because their friends look to them for leadership; they personify the traits which their friends admire the most in men. Max and Jim, of In Dubious Battle, George, of Of Mice and Men, Tom Joad, and Mayor Orden are leaders with a definite goal in mind. They have become leaders through a process of seeking and learning. Their goal is to lead their people to happiness and security—to find a place in the world for their people. Joe Saul represents all of them; he has discovered that humanity is holy, and that there must be love for all humanity.

The leaders are strong men physically; they are capable of hard work. Danny and Jack will avoid work, but they are good workers when it is forced upon them. Again, as in the case of the understanding ones, Steinbeck describes the hands of the leaders in detail. It seems that Steinbeck places strength of character in the hands; eyes are not nearly as important to Steinbeck as hands. This tendency seems to point out that Steinbeck's
hope for mankind is found in people who are laborers; people who work for a living and work at living.

The leaders must be willing to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs. Jim Salon and Mayor Orden give their lives for what they believe is true, and there is no doubt that the others would do the same. Joe Saul sacrifices his own egotism, and that is what all the leaders must do in the final analysis. Without exception, the leaders are interested in mankind; some have a broader view of mankind than others (Tom Joad and Joe Saul.) They have to go through a period of rejecting what life offers so that they may realize their goals. They all possess the same love for humanity.
CHAPTER VI

WOMEN—GOOD AND BAD

The women in John Steinbeck's fiction are not as freely drawn as the men. When Steinbeck characterizes a woman, he does so with a hesitancy which indicates thought and consideration. Women are not very important in his fiction; he uses them for some specific purpose in plot. There are no leading characters who are women, with the exception of Ma Joad.

There are two types of women characters: the good and the bad. The paisano-women, found in The Pastures of Heaven and Tortilla Flat, would be classified as good by Steinbeck's standards. Tia Ignacia, Dolores Ramirez, and the Lopez sisters are the same characterization. Steinbeck expresses his attitude toward all of them in the foreword of Tortilla Flat.

Perhaps this is shocking. It doesn't seem so to me. Perhaps it is quaint—God help it. I have been subjected to decency for a long time, and still I can't think of the house-lady as (that nastiest of words) a prostitute, nor of Big Joe's many aunts, those jolly men who sometimes gave us nickels, as her clients.1

1John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, p. 11.
These lines are representative of Steinbeck's feelings toward these passionate, fun-loving women. There is nothing bad in their promiscuousness because they have no moral guilt. The Lopez sisters are merely being good business women when they give themselves to their customers. The only bad thing these women could do would be to deny themselves and their gentlemen friends the pleasures which they are so liberal with. In the paisano-women there is no pretense, no guilt; they simply use what they have to the best advantage.

Similar to the paisano-women are Dora Flood, of Cannery Row, and Camille Oaks, of The Wayward Bus. Dora Flood is described as being a big woman with flaming orange hair. She was the owner of a house of ill-repute called the Bear Flag Restaurant. Dora was known throughout Cannery Row for her large contributions to charities and her big heart. She was as kind to her girls as she was to her customers, and she gave them a sense of dignity which the profession did not ordinarily have.

Dora Flood, through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity, and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind.2

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2John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 16.
Camille Oaks, the strip-tease artist in The Wayward Bus, possessed the same realism and respect as Dora. Camille was the kind of girl that all men watched walk by; she knew she was different from other girls, but she did not know why. Men fought over her when she was around, but women did not like her. Camille's interest in the little waitress, Norma, showed her loneliness and desire to be like other people. Her kindness toward the plain girl was the same kindness that Dora Flood felt for the girl of her house.

Camille tried to explain herself to Norma, and in doing this she explained the kind of experiences she had in life.

'Look, kid,' she said. 'You'll just have to believe this until you find it out for yourself--everybody's a tramp some time or other. Everybody. And the worst tramps of all are the ones that call it something else.'

Dora and Camille faced life with a realism which most women lack. They knew what they were and they did not pretend to be something else. This self-recognition gave them the ability to judge other people for what they really were. Camille's being something of a "tramp" did not keep

her from dreaming of a better life for herself. Her secret dream of happiness is similar to the dreams of Lennie and George, in *Of Mice and Men*, and Ma Joad, in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

What she really wanted was a nice house in a nice town, two children, and a stairway to stand on. She would be nicely dressed and people would be coming to dinner. She'd have a husband, of course, but she couldn't see him in her picture because the advertising in the women's magazines from which her dream came never included him. Just a lovely woman in nice clothes coming down the stairs and guests in the dining room and candles and a dark wood dining table, and clean children to kiss good night. That's what she really wanted. And she knew as well as anything that that was not what she would ever get.4

Such women as the paisanos, Camille, and Dora are certainly not the ideals of respectable society; Steinbeck has said in many ways that he has no use for the respectable. The honesty and realism of this type of woman make them respectable in Steinbeck's fiction.

In fact, Steinbeck is much more complimentary to the women whom society calls evil than he is to those whom society considers good. There are a few wives to whom Steinbeck gives reasoning and individuality, but most of them fit into one pattern. They are in the novels or stories for some specific reason, but they are not developed

characters and they are not essential to the stories. The main purpose of the wife in Steinbeck's fiction is to give birth to a child.

Elizabeth McDougall, in To A God Unknown, is a good illustration of the young wife's place in the novel. She had been a school teacher before she married Joseph Wayne. Miss Morgan, the young school teacher in The Pastures of Heaven, is very similar to Elizabeth. Perhaps, they are the same character and Elizabeth's story begins where Miss Morgan's ends. When Elizabeth married Joseph she was not completely in love with him, but as time passed he became her only thought. She was completely dominated by him; her thoughts and actions were only a reflection of his thoughts and actions. Elizabeth had her child to please Joseph; his pagan form of worship became hers. Joseph was affected very little by his wife's death; she could not have lived without him. Joseph considered her a dutiful wife, and it seems that Steinbeck also considers the wife to be a reflection of the husband's personality.

The same type of woman is found in the characterizations of Lisa, of In Dubious Battle, and Rosasharn, of The Grapes of Wrath. These two are much alike. Lisa appears only two or three times in the novel; her first appearance is when she is in labor. She gives Mac and Jim the opportunity
they need to gain the confidence and trust of the fruit pickers. Rosasann has a more prominent role because her pregnancy is a constant worry to the family. However, her thoughts and actions are as simple as those of Lisa. Without Ma Joad to direct her, Rosasann would have been lost in the shadows of the men characters, as Lisa was. It is at Ma Joad's insistence that she feeds the starving man after her baby is born dead. This act is symbolic of man loving man-kind, but it is Ma Joad's act more than it is Rosasann's.

Mordeen, in *Burning Bright*, is perhaps the best example of the wife character. She goes even further than the other wives to show her complete love and servility. Mordeen knows that Joe Saul is sterile, and that he can not conceive a child. Because of her great love for Joe Saul and her desire to make him happy, she forces herself into an affair with the young man, Victor. This act becomes beautiful because of Mordeen's repulsion to Victor; she overcomes her own pride and feelings to commit it.

She cried fiercely, 'It's Joe Saul's baby, conceived in love for him. I saw his face hovering over me. I felt his arms—not yours. You don't exist in this, Victor. The little seed may have been yours, I have forgotten. But no love was given or offered or taken. No! It's Joe Saul's baby. Joe Saul's and mine.'

She glared at him like a mother cat, and her claws were out. And then she backed to the cot, her teeth bared and her nostrils
flaring. She breathed in little bursts. 'And no one, nothing will take that away. I had to do an alien thing, had to hide my hurt in a mountain cave of love to do it. You nor any consideration will take this child away from Joe Saul. Believe it, Victor. If I could do that thing before—think what I could do now.'

It is this act of Mordeen's that makes Joe Saul understand the importance of man loving man-kind. He is not so disturbed about Mordeen's unfaithful act as he is about the child not being his own. When Joe Saul accepts the child, he accepts Mordeen and realizes what she has done for him. Again, the wife is used for child bearing; she acts out of love and obedience to her husband. Joe Saul is the hero because he understands that the child symbolizes mankind.

All that Mordeen understands is her love for her husband.

These characters: Elizabeth, Lisa, Rosasharn, and Mordeen: are almost unimportant in their respective novels. The birth of the child is the only purpose these women have; the birth is their climax as characters. Perhaps, this is Steinbeck's conception of women's purposes. Steinbeck is kinder to these women than to those who do not follow a set pattern and produce children. He presents them as more or less colorless individuals, without thought or motive, except to reflect the husband's wishes.

5John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, p. 105.
There are other wives who have a different purpose in the novel from that of child bearing. Rama, in *To A God Unknown*, was a strong, full-breasted woman with black brows that nearly met over her nose. Her strong white hands looked like those of a pianist. Rama was more or less contemptuous of men; she had three children and was a good wife and mother.

Rama had ways of making her field; cooking, sewing, the bearing of children, housecleaning seen the most important things in the world; much more important than the things men did. The children adored Rama when they had been good, for she knew how to stroke the tender places in the soul. Her praise could be as delicate and sharp as her punishment was terrible. She automatically took charge of all children who came near her. Burton's two children recognized her authority as far more legally constituted than the changeable rules their own soft mother made, for the laws of Rama never changed, bad was bad and bad was punished, and good was eternally, delightfully good. It was delicious to be good in Rama's house.

In the novel, Rama is the only person who comes near to understanding Joseph. Her understanding of him comes from instinct, not from reason; her power and authority over other people is also instinct. If there is a character who resembles Ma Joad, it is Rama. Rama rules the family in the unobvious, unseen way that Ma Joad leads.

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7 Ibid., p. 27.
her family. Rama understands Joseph in the manner that
Ma understands Tom. Rama tries to explain Joseph to
Elizabeth when she comes to the house as a bride.

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

Society would not think Rama was a good wife. She had
slept with her husband's younger brother, Benjy, and the
night Elizabeth died she gave herself to Joseph. Yet she
is a far stronger character than the other wives; she holds
the family together and she partially understands Joseph.

Ma Joad, in The Grapes of Wrath, is Steinbeck's most
outstanding woman character. In my opinion she is one of
Steinbeck's greatest character creations. Rama's character
is a preview to Ma's; they are embodied with the same
strength and understanding. However, Ma is a much more
developed character and a more important one than Rama.
Perhaps, no character in modern American fiction has the
strength and endurance of Ma Joad.

The strongest character of all is Ma. She
is a tower of strength in all that concerns
the family welfare and the great mission of

\[8\text{Ibid., p. 90.}\]
keeping them together and intact. She is dreaming of the little farm and little white house among the orange trees where they will live together in peace when they have once found a place to work and save. But it is her mission to see them fall away one by one under the terrible stress of their misfortunes.

Steinbeck's description of Ma Joad makes her the strong and vivid character that she is. She is presented with respect and admiration.

Tom stood looking in. Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child-bearing and work. She wore a loose Mother Hubbard of gray cloth, in which there had once been colored flowers, but the color was washed out now, so that the small flowered pattern was only a little lighter gray than the background. The dress came down to her ankles, and her strong, broad, bare feet moved quickly and deftly over the floor. Her thin, steel-gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head. Strong, freckled arms were bare to the elbow, and her hands were chubby and delicate, like those of a plump little girl. She looked out into the sunshine. Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledged hurt and fear, she had practiced denying them in herself. And since, when a joyful thing happened, they looked to see whether joy was on her, it was her habit to build up laughter out of inadequate materials. But better than joy was calm.

9Beach, op. cit., p. 331.
Imperturbability could be depended upon. And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess. She seemed to know that if she swayed the family, shock, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despared the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone.10

Ma is not a talker; she has spent her life having children and cooking. She has always been a source of strength to the family, but this becomes more obvious during the trip to California. On the road Ma Joad is changed, and she is no longer quiet and reserved. Her one objective is to keep the family together, and all of her thoughts and actions are directed toward this objective. In the scene where Ma refuses to leave Tom and Casy, her determination becomes known to the group.

The eyes of the whole family shifted back to Ma. She was the power. She had taken control. 'The money we'd make wouldn't be no good,' she said. 'All we got is the family unbroken. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobes are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up. The Williams here is with us, an' the preacher is with us. I can't say nothin' if they want to go, but I'm a-goin' out and wild with this here piece a bar-arn if my own folks busts up.' Her tone was cold and final.11

The deaths of the old people and the desertion of Connie and Noah made Ma more determined to keep the family together. She demonstrated her powerful love and strength by lying beside the old grandma for hours after she died. Her one thought was that the family must go on. Ma's only fear was that the family would be separated, and she knew that together they had strength enough to survive.

Ma's main inspiration came from Tom. She knew that Tom was different from the others, and she knew that he understood her. Ma felt that Tom would be the one to keep the family together, but when he was forced to leave Ma understood why he had to go. Through Tom, Ma understood Casey's philosophy, which was not too much different from her own. Ma knew that Tom would do the things for other people that she was trying to do for the family.

The last scene of the book proves that Ma has not lost her strength and determination. Conditions could not be worse for the family: the old people and Casey are dead, Rosasharn has lost her baby, Tom is gone, and the family is running from a flood and hunger. Yet, when they come upon the starving man in the barn, Ma knows that his life must be saved, and she persuades Rosasharn to feed him.

This final episode is symbolic in its way of what is, I should say, the leading theme of the book. It is a type of the life-instinct, the vital persistence of the common people who are represented by the Joads. Their sufferings and
humiliations are overwhelming; but these people
are never entirely overwhelmed. They have
something in them that is more than stoical
endurance. It is the will to live, and the
faith in life. The one who gives voice to
this is Ma.12

Ma Joad's philosophy is found in the words she speaks
to Tom when they are forced to leave the government camp.
It is this philosophy that sustains Ma throughout the
novel; it is this philosophy that keeps the family alive.

'Easy,' she said. 'You got to have patience.
Why, Tom--us people will go on livin' when all
them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people
that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why,
we're the people--we go on.'

'We take a beatin' all the time.'
'I know.' Ma chuckled. 'Maybe that makes us
tough. Rich fellas come up an' they die, an'
their kids ain't no good, an' they die out. But,
Tom, we keep a-comin'. Don' you fret none, Tom.
A different time's comin'.'

'How do you know?'
'I don' know how.'13

When Ma gives Tom her strength and encouragement, she
is doing the same thing for people everywhere. There can
be no defeat or failure for people who believe as strongly
as Ma that "we're the people--we go on."

The hussy of Steinbeck's fiction is Curley's wife, in
Of Mice and Men. Actually, she commits no outward sin, but
every move she makes indicates evil.

12Beach, op. cit., p. 332.

She had full, rouged lips—and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her fingernails were red. Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages. She wore a cotton house dress and red mules, on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers. 'I'm lookin' for Curley,' she said. Her voice had a nasal, brittle quality.\(^\text{14}\)

Curley's wife is the only woman in the novel, and she is the cause of Lennie's death. Lennie cannot understand the evil quality in her that the other men see; he does not know enough to stay away from her.

This book, like all of Steinbeck's books, has no heroine. The woman is always the destructive force in the drama he unfolds. She is a painted and brainless hussy whose devastating fascination Lennie cannot withstand. It is not without significance that he should dare so radical an innovation, and it is an incontestable proof of his power as a writer that he can hold his readers while he flaunts their pet sentimentality. For only a great prose artist whose touch is unfailing for the right stop and right tone, could carry off this daring affront to America's pet piety—the sanctity of woman.\(^\text{15}\)

It seems that Steinbeck uses Curley's wife in much the manner that he uses Rosasharn and the others; she is an instrument of plot. In spite of the degrading picture of the woman, there is a certain compassion toward her. The reader feels pity for her, and sees her actions as a result of her loneliness and unhappiness.

\(^{14}\)John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, p. 57.

Alice Chiccoy, in *The Wayward Bus*, arouses the same pity. She is Juan’s wife, and she cannot live without him. She is unhappy because she knows that she cannot live without Juan and that he can live much happier without her. Because of her unhappiness and uncertainty about Juan she is cruel to all other people.

The meanness of Alice cannot compare with that of Bernice Pritchard, in the same novel. Bernice was the epitome of respectability; she always did and said the proper thing. Her life was well planned, and her home and family left the impression of being perfect.

Bernice’s friends knew her as one of the sweetest, most unselfish people you will ever meet, and they often referred to her as a saint. And she herself said often that she felt humbly lucky, for she had the finest, most loyal friends in the whole world. She loved flowers and planted and pinched and fertilized and cut them. She kept great bowls of flowers in her house always, so that her friends said it was like being in a florist’s shop, and she arranged them herself so beautifully.  

Bernice’s outward appearances had nothing to do with her inward character. She was unhappy and made her husband and daughter unhappy with her complete conventionality. She could not deviate from her pattern of conventions enough

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to enjoy life, much less to be interested in other people. Bernice was as cold physically as she was emotionally, and she looked down on anyone who enjoyed living. Here is a woman who possesses all the qualities that society looks for in a wife, and Steinbeck shows the effect of the respectable attitude on her meager little soul. The respectable wife is at the very bottom of the list of Steinbeck's women characters. Everything that is good about Bernice Pritchard is in reality evil and cruel. It seems that Steinbeck sees nothing wrong with prostitution of the body, but prostitution of the soul, which is what Bernice has done to herself, is the unpardonable sin.

This same idea is recognized in "The Chrysanthemums," from The Long Valley. Elisa Allen is a perfectionist in her home and garden. When the peddler forces her to see reality in life, she is hurt and amazed. In "Johnny Bear" the idea of respectability versus goodness is more pointed in the contrast between the two sisters. Emalin Hawkins is as cold to emotions and living as Bernice Pritchard is. Amy is opposite; she finds happiness in her association with the Chinese laborers employed on the farm. In this short story, Amy is the one who knows what living and humanity consist of; Emalin with her false pride and virtue is the evil one of the two.
What strange things Steinbeck does to women! He reverses the standards that society has always held; the good ones are bad, and the bad ones are good. Those like Dora Flood and Camille Oaks who earn their living with their bodies are spiritually clean, according to Steinbeck. They are the only women that he gives individuality and character. The wives, in general, are not individuals; the good wives worship their husbands and have babies, and the bad wives are respectable women. There are no leading women characters in Steinbeck's fiction; he is interested in the women as potential mothers or prostitutes, but the fate of humanity lies in the men characters.
CHAPTER VII

MEN -- YOUNG AND OLD

The minor characters in Steinbeck's fiction consist of men who may be classified in four groups. These groups are the irresponsible and happy men, found in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, the responsible young men, the unhappy middle-aged men, and the old men. There are a number of these minor men characters; they are not important as characters but they are important to plot. These minor characters represent the masses; they are the followers, and they are the ones for whom the leaders and the understanding ones have concern. They are the ordinary and average human beings who possess the weaknesses and the virtues of humanity. Steinbeck treats them kindly; he likes these men and he feels compassion for them.

The characters in the first group are all similar. The irresponsible men in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat live the same kind of lives. They are simple men without cares or responsibilities. The majority of them are single men, and when a married man is found among them, he has joined the group because the responsibility of marriage is too much for him. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat live the simplest
kind of life. Pilon, the paisano who loves beauty, explains their happiness and lack of guilt.

'And what was the result, Big Joe Portagee? I have had a mean feeling. I have known I would go to Hell. But now I see that the sinner is never so bad that he cannot be forgiven. Although I have not yet been to confession, I can feel that the change in me is pleasing to God, for his grace is upon me. If you, too, would change your ways, Big Joe, if you would give up drunkenness and fighting and those girls down at Dora Williams' House, you too might feel as I do.'

Of course, Big Joe and Pilon and the other paisanos go on with their drinking and fighting, but they know in their hearts that "no sinner is so bad that he cannot be forgiven."

Steinbeck expresses the same belief in the salvation of the irresponsible inhabitants at the Palace Flophouse. In his opinion, their lack of responsibility and lack of ambition make them a special people in the eyes of God.

Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blotson-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums. Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blotson-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys. Virtues and graces and laziness and zest. Our Father who art in nature.

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2 John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*, p. 15.
The "no-goods" are the only completely happy men in Steinbeck's fiction. Their happiness is comparable to that of the little children and the half-wits. It seems that the happiness of the three is possible because of lack of responsibility and ambition.

The complete happiness of the "no-good" is exemplified by the character of Benjamin, the youngest brother in *To a God Unknown*. Benjy was married, but in his case this made no difference. His young wife sought to keep him from being hurt because she was attracted to him in the same way as other women.

He was dissolute and undependable; given a chance, he drank himself into a romantic haze and walked about the country, singing gloriously. He looked so young, so helpless and so lost that many women pitied him, and for this reason Benjamin was nearly always in trouble with some woman or other. For when he was drunk and singing and the lost look in his eyes, women wanted to hold him against their breasts and protect him from his blunders. It always surprised those who mothered Benjamin when he seduced them. They never knew quite how it happened, for he was a deadly helplessness... Benjy was a happy man, and he brought happiness and pain to everyone who knew him. He lied, stole a little, cheated, broke his word and imposed upon kindnesses; and everyone loved Benjy and excused and guarded him. 3

Benjy's happiness, like that of the paisanos and Mack's boys, came from his complete lack of responsibility. He was happy because he cared for nothing or no person, and because of his irresponsible air people loved him and wished to

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3 John Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown*, p. 28.
protect him. It seems that Steinbeck feels the same affection for the other "no-goods"; he likes them because they are happy and irresponsible.

In direct contrast to the happy men are the young men who have responsibilities and are not happy. These young men are of the same nature as Benjy and the paisanos; they would like to lead lives as simple and pleasurable as those of the paisanos, but there is always some person or thing to hold them back.

Al Anderson and Dick Halsing, in *In Dubious Battle*, were young men with great responsibility. Al was the owner of a lunch wagon in the town where the fruit pickers struck; he was sympathetic toward the strikers. Even after Al was beaten by the town people and his lunch wagon was burned, he remained true to the cause. Dick Halsing was a handsome dark-haired boy who appealed to women. He was a field worker for the Communists, and his job was to get food to the strikers' camp. Dick was called a "bedroom radical" by his friends, and he was very efficient when he was working with women. The two men were loyal to the party; in fact, the Communist Party was their life and they felt a responsibility toward it. They would never be free to live a completely happy life; they were married to Communism.

Curley, in *Of Mice and Men*, is also an unhappy young man because of his responsibility. His wife is not the type of woman to be trusted, and Curley is extremely jealous of
her because she cannot stay away from other men. If Cur-ley had not been married, he could have enjoyed living and would have been free of his jealousy and responsibility.

_The Grapes of Wrath_ contains two young men who have too much responsibility to be happy. Connie Rivers, Rosasharn's husband, was a tall, lean young man from Texas. Connie was quiet and he never boasted, but he always did what was required of him. He was probably in love with Rosasharn, but her pregnancy and the difficulties of the family were too much for him—he deserted. The responsibility of a wife was too much for him; Connie knew that he could provide for himself and be happy without Rosasharn and the family.

Al Joad was sixteen years old; he walked with a swaying strut and he was cocky. He was greatly impressed by Tom's prison record, and was disappointed when Tom did not talk about it. Al was an excellent mechanic; he and Tom were responsible for the family's transportation to California. Al took his responsibility seriously because Tom took it seriously. Al would have liked to have left the family as Connie had; he knew he could do more by himself. However, Tom and Ma Joad were a great influence on Al. In the same manner that Dick Halsing and Al Anderson had married the Communist Party, Al Joad had married the family. Physically he was much like Curley in _Of Mice and Men_, but his responsibility to the family was the same as the young Communists' responsibility to the strike.
Pimples Carson, in *The Wayward Bus*, is a different type character from Al Joad. He is about seventeen years old and is very sex conscious.

His whole system and his soul were a particularly violent battleground of adolescence. His concupiscence was constant, and when it was not directly and openly sexual it would take to channels of melancholy, of deep and tearful sentiment, or of a strong and musky religiosity. His mind and his emotions were like his face, constantly erupting, constantly raw and irritated. He had times of violent purity when he howled at his own depravity, and these were usually followed by a melancholy laziness that all but prostrated him, and he went from the depression into sleep. It was opiate and left him drugged and dull for a long time. 4

Pimples was very much alone in the world; he had no family or no one to care for. He worshiped Juan and wanted to be like him. It would have been easy for Pimples to live a free and easy life, but that was not what he wanted. He wanted desperately to belong to some one and to be responsible to someone. His loneliness and unhappiness in his adolescence were a result of his not having someone to care for. A study of Pimple's character leaves the impression that he would soon out-grow this unhappy state and find happiness in the responsibility of marriage.

Victor, in *Burning Bright*, has much the same problem as Pimples. He is unhappy because he does not understand Mordeen and Joe Saul, and he does not belong with them. Victor is attractive physically; he is large and dark and

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young looking. In the beginning of the novel, his physical desires are his only concern, and his ego is flattered when Mordeen gives herself to him. Victor's unhappiness begins when he realizes that Mordeen used him to make Joe Saul happy. Victor can not understand this kind of love, but he feels a need for love beyond physical desire.

'No,' he said wondering. 'It's too late. I must have you and my child.' The hysterical intensity grew in his voice. 'I must have that. It would be good if you wanted me as much as I want you, but I must have you whether you wish it or not. This is my whole life. I won't throw it away no matter what comes of it. Look!' he cried. 'I tried to run away and leave you and my child to old Joe Saul. And I couldn't do it. I came back. And I tried to be wise -- to stand by like a chuckolded goat and see my woman and my child in Joe Saul's arms. And I cannot do it.'

Victor is the type of young man who would be happy with the gangs in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat, but he discovers that love is necessary for happiness. He is unhappy when he learns that he is not included in Mordeen's love. Like Pimplies, Victor needs and is ready to accept responsibility in order that he may find love.

The young men who have a sense of responsibility are never completely happy. These young men are restricted by their wives, families, or some cause which they believe in. Victor and Pimplies are not happy because they want something they do not have -- they want to feel responsible.

The middle-aged men in Steinbeck's fiction are not happy either. They are, in general, lonely and disillusioned men.

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5 John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, p. 130.
Uncle John and Pa Joad, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, are very similar. They are about the same age, and both of them depend on other people to make their decisions. When the family begins the trip to California, Ma Joad asserts her authority for the first time; she becomes the head of the family. Pa Joad and Uncle John are too tired and beaten down to object to Ma's authority. It seems that they are willing to let Ma and Tom bear most of the burdens; they are relieved to give the responsibilities of the family to someone else.

The leaders of the strike in *In Dubious Battle*, London and Dakin, have the same feeling of resignation. They have the ability to lead and influence the men, but they are willing to let Mac and Jim tell them what to do. There are many things about the strike that they do not understand, but they do what the younger men tell them to. London and Dakin are like Uncle John and Pa Joad; they are the leaders in name only. Their days of reasoning and planning are ended; they are tired men who have lost their self-confidence.

Colonel Lanser, in *The Moon is Down*, presents the same type of character. He was a tired looking man, and his eyes lacked the blank look of the ordinary soldier. Colonel Lanser did not like or approve of the things the Nazi party stood for; he had seen too much of war. He obeyed orders mechanically, and he tried not to think of the cause or result of his actions. The Colonel was a tired and disillusioned man; he was as much a puppet for the Nazis as London was for Mac and Jim.
One of the strongest characterizations of the middle-aged man is Mr. Pritchard in *The Wayward Bus*. Mr. Pritchard is described as being the typical successful businessman. Steinbeck's opinion of the typical businessman is not a pleasing one.

Mr. Pritchard was a businessman, president of a medium-sized corporation. He was never alone. His business was conducted by groups of men who worked alike, thought alike, and even looked alike. His lunches were with men like himself who joined together in clubs so that no foreign element or idea could enter. His religious life was again his lodge and his church, both of which were screened and protected. One night a week he played poker with men so exactly like himself that the game was fairly even, and from this fact his group was convinced that they were very fine poker players. Wherever he went he was not one man but a unit in a corporation, a unit in a club, in a lodge, in a church, in a political party. His thoughts and ideas were never subjected to criticism since he willingly associated only with people like himself. He read a newspaper written by and for his group. The books that came into his house were chosen by a committee which deleted material that might irritate him. He hated foreign countries and foreigners because it was difficult to find his counterpart in them. He did not want to stand out from his group. He would like to have risen to the top of it and be admired by it; but it would not occur to him and to leave it. At occasional stags where naked girls danced on the tables and sat in great glasses of wine, Mr. Pritchard howled with laughter and drank the wine, but five hundred Mr. Pritchards were there with him.  

When the bus broke down, Mr. Pritchard became interested in the other passengers. Mr. Pritchard had not always been the kind of man he was now; at one time he had had his own thoughts and ideas. Unknowingly, Camille Oakes and Ernest

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Horton make Mr. Pritchard see himself as he really is. He is hurt and disappointed at what he learns about himself, but he knows that he will not change. Mr. Pritchard's thought and actions are directed by his "group" in the same manner that the Nazis give Colonel Lanser orders.

The middle-aged men are not strong characters. They are tired physically and mentally, and most of them are ready to take the path of least resistance. This may indicate that Steinbeck has more confidence in young men, and that middle-age is an age of resignation to whatever life has offered.

The old men are more vivacious characters than the middle-aged men. Steinbeck has created four outstanding old men characters; they are similar in appearance and action. Dan, the old fruit picker, and Anderson, the orchard owner, are found in *In Dubious Battle*. Both of these old men are active and full of energy. They have worked hard during their lives, and in old age they think mostly of themselves. Old Dan is not particularly interested in the progress of the strike; he enjoys the excitement and the attention he gets after he is injured. Anderson is merely on the side that can do him the most good; he is interested in his own orchard and not the welfare of the strikers. It seems that Dan and Anderson have seen too much of life to be worried about humanity; they think of their own welfare.
Candy, in *Of Mice and Men*, is a tall, stoop-shouldered old man whose right hand is cut off. Candy is a humble person because he knows that he is no longer useful to anyone. Candy does not have the energy or meanness of Dan and Anderson. When Candy starts planning to share with George and Lennie their "little bit of land," he does become excited, and he begins thinking about himself. He forgets that he is an old man and begins to think that there may be a place for him in the world. However, when Lennie dies, Candy's dream dies with him, and he is once more a humble old man.

Grampa Joad, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is similar to Dan. He was a lean, quick, little man. He had an excitable face "with little bright eyes as evil as a frantic child's eyes." Grampa Joad fought, argued, and told dirty stories; he acted like an impatient child most of the time. When the family left the land, the old man was forced to go. He and Grandma were too old for the trip, and neither one of them lived very long when they were taken away from their home.

The old men are no longer concerned with universal thoughts or problems; they have become self-centered individuals. The middle-aged men are not far behind them; they are unhappy and disappointed in life. The young men with responsibility are not completely happy, but they are ready to accept life.

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as it comes. The happiest man in Steinbeck's fiction are those who have nothing and do not wish to have anything.

Crooks, in Of Mice and Men, is an interesting and exceptional character. He is an exception because he is the only Negro character Steinbeck has created. What he does in the novel is not so important; he is important for what he is—a Negro. Crooks was an aloof man; he kept his distance and he wanted the white men to keep theirs. He always felt that he was discriminated against because he was black. The half-wit, Lennie, came closer to making Crooks forget that he was black than anyone else; Lennie with his childlike mind could not understand that there was difference between Crooks and the other workers. Crooks explained to Lennie how he felt about being a Negro.

Crooks said gently, 'Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's goin' to come back, s'pose you didn't have nobody. s'pose you couldn't go into the bunk house and play rummy 'cause you was black. How'd you like that? s'pose you had to sit out here an' read books. Sure you could play horse-shoes till it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody—to be near him.' He whined, 'A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. I tell ya,' he cried, 'I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick.'

The color of his skin does not worry Crooks so much, but he knows that the color of his skin keeps him from being like the others and that is what he resents. For a few shining moments he forgets that he is black, and he dreams that

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8John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, p. 127.
he may be included in George and Lennie’s plan. When Curley’s wife comes in Crooks is jerked out of his dream and he becomes a "nigger" again.

She turned on him in scorn. "Listen, Nigger," she said. "You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?"

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself. She closed on him. "You know what I could do?"

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. "Yes, ma’am."

"Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny."

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego — nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, "Yes, ma’am," and his voice was toneless.

This character is important only because he is negro, and he is Steinbeck’s attempt to understand the negro. Steinbeck sees him as a lonely man who is segregated from society by the color of his skin. Some of the resentment is built up in Crook’s mind, and he has built a protective shell around himself. It is as though he is waiting every minute for someone to remind him that he is black. Perhaps Crooks reveals Steinbeck’s attitude toward the negro when he says, "A colored man got to have some rights even if he don’t like ’em." 10

10 Ibid., p. 143.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

There are several points that have been made in this study that should be emphasized. Steinbeck has used a basic pattern for character development in his fiction. In some instances the characters may look and speak differently, but they are the same characters. In all such cases, the characters are similar in appearance, action, and plot.

Steinbeck's masterpiece, as far as character creation is concerned, seems to have been *The Grapes of Wrath*. The character pattern is more obvious in this novel than in the others. Ruthie and Winfield are representative of all the children; Noah denotes the characteristics of the other half-wits; Casey exemplifies the understanding ones; Tom portrays the development of a leader; Ma Joad is the strongest woman character created by Steinbeck; and the minor characters fit the pattern in the same manner. The characters of *The Grapes of Wrath* seem to be the results of earlier experiments in characterization. The characters in works following *The Grapes of Wrath* are of the same pattern.
It seems that Steinbeck has created one set of characters for all of his fiction, and these characters appear and re-appear. Because he uses the same pattern in creating characters, it seems that Steinbeck is not particularly concerned with his characters as such. He is so much involved with his theme that he does not create new characters. Steinbeck uses his characters as symbols, and as symbols they become important to the plot; they are not important as mere characters.

_Burning Bright_, Steinbeck's latest work, is an obvious presentation of the morality play concept of character. This concept of character is foreshadowed in Steinbeck's earlier type characterizations.
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