

**AN EXPLORATION OF CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS
INTRINSIC TO THE MATRIX OF JOHN STEINBECK'S
FICTION AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE CRITICAL
RECEPTION OF HIS WORK, WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
*TO A GOD UNKNOWN***

BY

RONALD WILKINSON

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of English at the University of Zululand
KwaDlangezwa

Supervisors : Professor NCT Meihuizen
Mr JA Crumley
External Examiner : Professor GF Evans

DECEMBER 1998

ABSTRACT

At the centre of this dissertation is the paradox to be found in the fact that although John Steinbeck was the recipient of some of the highest accolades ever to be bestowed upon a writer during this century, his work – and even his person – have, over the years, been subjected to severe attacks from sometimes impercipient critics.

In the thirties, he was branded as a California regionalist of some distinction, but the general consensus among the critics seemed to be that he was unlikely to achieve greatness due to major artistic flaws that were perceived to be present in his work. These flaws included his purported indecency, vulgarity, sexual licence and demagoguery. Reverse reasoning, by which his 'weaker, later works' (especially post World War II) are compared unfavourably with 'the better earlier ones' of the thirties, is also dealt with. Other aspects that receive attention are his world-view (which is often misunderstood and compared unfavourably with that of other authors) and the fact that his deceptively lucid works are easy to read and therefore often underrated by critics as well as careless readers.

Although criticism which centres upon ethical, sociological and political issues instead of artistic merit, is briefly dealt with, emphasis is placed on three elements that are intrinsic to Steinbeck's fiction and their role in the acceptance of his work. These elements, namely allegory/myth, non-teleological thinking and his approach to religion, are dealt with in general terms but also with particular reference to his novel *To a God Unknown*.

To a God Unknown was specifically chosen as a focus for this study because it is believed that it reveals many of the 'flaws' that Steinbeck has been criticised for. It is also considered to be of seminal importance in his canon and therefore a harbinger of later works. As such it reveals a great deal about the author's outlook on life, early influences on his work, theoretical and practical approaches to his writing, and the various techniques employed to achieve his goals. The novel is also a typical example of one of Steinbeck's works of fiction that enjoys a wide and continued readership in

spite of the adverse criticism that attended its appearance. This anomaly is central to the study.

Virtually all of the works in Steinbeck's canon as well as the reviews and criticisms of internationally recognised Steinbeck scholars and critics collectively served as a 'pool of reference' in the compilation of this dissertation. Other sources included works on American and world literature and history; philosophy; psychology; biography; mythology; theology, and other aspects that have a bearing upon the subject matter. Extensive use was made of the excellent facilities and services provided by the university library as well as by various institutions and individuals on the Internet.

The conclusion is reached that it is essential to take cognisance of the Oriental aspect of the Transcendentalist influence on Steinbeck's world-view in order to understand the confluence of apparently irreconcilable philosophical and mythological anomalies in Steinbeck's fiction.

SAMEVATTING

Die kernvraagstuk wat in hierdie verhandeling onder die loep geneem word, is gesetel in die paradoksale verskynsel dat hoewel John Steinbeck bepaald as een van die mees vereerde skrywers wat hierdie eeu opgelewer het beskou kan word, hy nogtans dikwels die teiken was van soms verwoede aanvalle deur, dikwels, stompsinnige kritici.

Gedurende die dertigerjare is hy gebrandmerk as 'n redelik-gedistingeerde Kaliforniese streekskrywer, maar die algemene beskouing was dat hy nie juis in die literêre wêreld sou uitstyg nie as gevolg van sy "emstige artistieke tekortkominge." Na bewering het sy sogenaamde tekortkominge as skrywer, onder andere, die volgende ingesluit: onfatsoenlikheid, vulgariteit, sedeloosheid en demagogie. Verder was daar 'n neiging om sy sogenaamde "swakker, latere werke" (veral na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog) ongunstiglik met sy "vroëere, beter werke" van die dertigerjare te vergelyk. Ander aspekte wat in hierdie verhandeling gedek word, sluit Steinbeck se wêreldbeskouing (wat dikwels misverstaan word en ongunstiglik met dié van ander skrywers vergelyk word) in, sowel as die feit dat sy oënskynlik "maklik-verstaanbare" werke dikwels deur ondeurdagte lesers en kritici geringskat word.

Alhoewel kritiek wat op etiese, sosiologiese en politiese (in plaas van artistieke) strydvrae gesentreerd is wel vlugtig behandel word, val die klem veral op drie elemente wat as intrinsieke kenmerke van Steinbeck se fiksie beskou word en wat 'n belangrike rol in die beoordeling van sy werk speel. Hierdie elemente, naamlik non-teleologiese denke, allegorie/mitologie en Steinbeck se benadering tot die religie, word in die algemeen, maar ook met spesiale verwysing na sy novelle, *To a God Unknown*, behandel.

Die voormelde werk is veral as uitgangspunt gekies vanweë die feit dat dit talle van die sogenaamde defekte bevat waarvoor Steinbeck beskuldig word. Hierdie novelle word ook as 'n gedagteryke boek beskou wat as voorspel sou dien vir latere werke. As sodanig, openbaar dit veel van die skrywer se lewensbeskouinge, vroëere invloede op sy werk, sowel as praktiese en teoretiese benaderinge tot sy skryfkuns en die tegnieke wat hy aangewend het om sy doelwitte te bereik. *To a God Unknown*

is ook 'n tipiese voorbeeld van een van die skrywer se werke wat vandag nog wyd gelees word ten spyte van die fel kritiek waaraan dit aanvanklik blootgestel was. Dié teenstrydigheid is 'n kernvraagstuk waarna ondersoek ingestel word.

Bykans al Steinbeck se werke sowel as die resensies en geskrifte van internasionaal-erkende kritici en Steinbeck-kundiges het as verwysingsraamwerk vir hierdie studie gedien. Ander bronne wat geraadpleeg is, sluit werke in oor die Amerikaanse- en wêreld-letterkunde en geskiedenis, wysbegeerte, sielkunde, lewensbeskrywings, mitologie, teologie, en ander aspekte wat betrekking het op die onderwerp. Daar is ruim gebruik gemaak van die uitstekende fasiliteite wat die universiteitsbiblioteek en die rekenaar-internetstelsel bied.

In hierdie verhandeling word daar tot die slotsom geraak dat, ten einde die samevloeiing van skynbaar onversoenbare filosofiese en mitologiese elemente in Steinbeck se verhaalkuns te verstaan, dit noodsaaklik is om kennis te neem van die Oosterse aspekte van die transendentalistiese filosofie waardeur Steinbeck se lewensbeskouing beïnvloed is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my indebtedness, thanks and appreciation to the following persons and institutions:

□ **My supervisors, Professor Nicholas C T Meihuizen and Mr John A Crumley** of the Durban-Umlazi Campus of the University of Zululand, for sagacious advice and guidance through a period of considerable pressure. Their constant encouragement, kindness, patience and persistence were of inestimable value to me. Mr Crumley, an American with an intimate knowledge of his country's literature as well as of "Steinbeck Country," was a great inspiration, while Professor Meihuizen with his vast literary knowledge, and particularly of mythology, proved to be a mentor *par excellence*.

□ **Professor Myrtle J Hooper**, Head of the Department of English, for "discovering" my interest in literature and persuading me to embark upon postgraduate studies. Her belief in my all-too-average abilities, together with encouragement and moral support provided the impetus that I needed to set my course and to follow it to its conclusion. In this regard it is also essential to acknowledge my indebtedness to the late **Professor Geoffrey J M Hutchings**, erstwhile Dean of Arts and Head of the English Department, who demonstrated his belief in me by taking me on as a "special" honours student in his department. I was privileged, through his inter-departmental approach to postgraduate study, to be a student not only of all the aforementioned lecturers, but also of **Professor W D Burger**, erstwhile Head of the Afrikaans Department, **Mr W J Ndaba** of the Department of Philosophy, **Mr G S Maphisa** of the Drama Department and **Doctor J M Phelps** of the English Department. I would also like to give special thanks to **Professor J A Loubser** of the Faculty of Theology, particularly for advice and assistance pertaining to research methodology in general.

□ The helpful **staff of the University Library** and, in particular, the section inter-library loans, for the acquisition of scarce research materials. Many other individuals have provided encouragement and/or other forms of assistance, especially with regard to computer literacy. They know who they are, and I would like to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to each one of them.

□ On a personal note, I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude and appreciation to my wife, **Hesma**, for her unfailing loyalty and support – sometimes at great sacrifice to herself. Her belief in the intrinsic value of my "ephemeral pursuits" was fundamental to the completion of this study. Thanks are also due to my sisters **Evelyn** and **Nan** as well as brother **Bill** and other family members and friends for moral support and encouragement. Finally, in acknowledging succour and support, I cannot leave out **Angie**, my ever-constant canine companion, who saw many suns rise over the sea together with me before this work was ended.

I hereby declare that this is my own work, both in conception and execution and that the opinions expressed or conclusions reached are not to be regarded as reflecting the views of the above-mentioned persons or institutions.

R WILKINSON

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Wilkinson", written in a cursive style.

DECEMBER 1998

*Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee?
Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?
Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?*

*Who can number the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven.
When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together?
Wilt thou hunt prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch
in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait?
Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander
for lack of meat...*

*... Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that
no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without
knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me,
which I knew not.*

Job 38:34-41 and 42:1-3

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): excerpt from 'Carrion Comfort'

To

*My wife, Hesma, with love and gratitude for unfailing loyalty and support, and
In loving memory of my mother, Cornelia Elizabeth Anne Wilkinson (Gradwell),
Who revealed to me some of the wonders to be found along the waysides of
"Once upon a time . . ."*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE: Terminology Used in Dealing With Recurrent Quintessential Elements in Steinbeck's Fiction	1
CHAPTER ONE: Antecedents: The Early Development of Steinbeck's Approach To His Work, Including Elements Intrinsic to His Fiction	9
CHAPTER TWO: Steinbeck's Artistic Merit: The Debate of the Thirties and Beyond	20
CHAPTER THREE: Examples of Steinbeck's Approach to His Work and the Role of External Influences, Including Politics, on the Acceptance of His Literature and His Person	33
CHAPTER FOUR: <i>To a God Unknown</i> : The Germ of the Novel, its Background and a Brief Exploration of Personal and Literary Factors that Influenced its Development	51
CHAPTER FIVE: <i>To a God Unknown</i> : Some Thoughts on the Title and Epigraph, and an Outline of the Plot	106
CHAPTER SIX: An Examination of the Development of Steinbeck's Philosophical Thought as Expressed in the Role of the Protagonist in the Narrative, With Special Reference to Non-Teleological Thinking, Religion and Allegory/Myth	161
CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions: Characteristic Elements Intrinsic to Steinbeck's Fiction and Their Effect on the Critical Reception of His Work, With Particular Reference To His Novel, <i>To a God Unknown</i>	212
STEINBECK CHRONOLOGY:	226
LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED:	230



A writer out of loneliness is trying to communicate like a distant star sending out signals. He isn't telling or teaching or ordering. Rather he seeks to establish a relationship of meaning, of feeling, of observing. We are lonesome animals. We spend all life trying to be less lonesome. One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say – and to feel – 'Yes, that's the way it is, or at least that's the way I feel it. You're not so lonely as you thought.' It is so hard to be clear. Only a fool will be wilfully obscure. . . . To finish is sadness to a writer – a little death. He puts the last word down and it is done. But it isn't really done. The story goes on and leaves the writer behind, because no story is ever done.

John Steinbeck, in a letter written in 1956. Portrait painting by Bo Beskow.

PREFACE

TERMINOLOGY USED IN DEALING WITH RECURRENT QUINTESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN STEINBECK'S FICTION

The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and sky-reflecting seas.

John Steinbeck: *Cannery Row* (1945).

Various scholars and critics have, over the years, pointed out certain recurrent elements in Steinbeck's fiction, but Warren French was one of the first to recognise a pattern in their employment as literary devices and certainly the first to enumerate and reduce them to 'three general tendencies that have done most to shape his [Steinbeck's] fiction' (1961: 8). French identified 'the three characteristics of Steinbeck's thought' as his 'tendency to write allegorically; his preoccupation with non-teleological thinking; and his theology which accords remarkably with that of the nineteenth-century American transcendentalists'. Although such a generalisation is viewed in this dissertation as an oversimplification of the wide range of devices employed by Steinbeck to fulfil various functions in his fiction, it nevertheless provides a valuable key to his approaches to writing and opens up a useful methodology in the practical analyses of his work.

Of the three characteristics formulated by French, the phrase 'tendency to write allegorically' poses the most problems as it is totally inadequate for the purposes of accurately reflecting the subtle nuances of the actual symbolic devices employed by Steinbeck in his application of 'the ancient art of discussing one thing, especially an unfamiliar or abstract concept, by talking about something familiar that stands for the

unfamiliar' (French, 1961: 8). French's phrase may, however, be perfectly acceptable if it is seen as a 'catch-all' intended to include, for example, the usage of other, similar, devices in Steinbeck's fiction such as parable, legend, lore, myth, metaphor, mysticism, fantasy, symbol and similitude. These approaches, generally termed 'allegory' by various critics, are certainly applicable to tendencies in Steinbeck's fiction as witnessed, for example, in Peter Lisca's sampling of phrases used by critics in the first chapter of *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (1958: 4-20). The term 'allegory', however, will be used most often in this dissertation to indicate one of the three tendencies that have done most to shape Steinbeck's fiction. 'Non-teleological thinking' is another complex concept but does not lend itself to multiple interpretations in the context of Steinbeck's fiction as 'allegory' does, and the term shall therefore be used in this dissertation as originally intended by Warren French. I do, however, find the usage of 'theology' in the context of 'Steinbeck's thought' ambiguous, and would therefore prefer to substitute it with 'religion'. 'Theology' refers to a system of theistic (especially Christian) religion and is more readily associated with theistic belief in gods or a god, but especially in a God supernaturally revealed to man (as in Deism) and sustaining a personal relation to His creatures. 'Religion', on the other hand, is open to a wider interpretation that is necessary, especially in view of elements of naturalism/ pantheism/ druidism that are among the subjects dealt with in this dissertation, as part of a tendency recognised by various critics in Steinbeck's fiction.

The main reason in examining French's usage of the words 'allegory', 'non-teleological thinking' and 'theology' is to point out the disadvantages of a too narrow interpretation of their meanings and to avoid a misunderstanding of their wider applications to Steinbeck's fiction. French himself uses three almost interchangeable versions of a word in the following sentence of a paragraph dealing with Steinbeck's tendency to write allegorically: 'The best known *allegories* are the *fables* of Aesop and the *parables* of Christ' (1968: 8) [my emphasis]. Whereas it would be perfectly acceptable to talk about Christ's allegories it would not be 'in order' to refer to 'His fables'. On the other

hand, 'fables' is a word that applies in the case of Aesop – but it would, strictly speaking, not be wrong to talk about his allegories or even parables in the sense of referring to narratives of imagined events used to illustrate moral (or spiritual) lessons. Similarly, John Bunyan's stories are best described as allegories and there would be little objection in referring to them as parables but one would hardly accept 'fables' in this context. The pitfalls in careless usage of terminology are obvious. However, the main point that I would like to make is that the tendencies in Steinbeck's thought as expressed by French can be used to great advantage in the analysis and evaluation of Steinbeck's fiction provided that French's terminology is not interpreted too rigidly and that one does not see his three-pronged approach as the last word in the analysis of elements that occur in Steinbeck's fiction. French himself realises this and acknowledges the fact in the preface to his book *John Steinbeck* (1961: 10):

In order to concentrate on the allegorical, non-teleological, and transcendental [note the substitution of 'theological' with 'transcendental!'] characteristics of Steinbeck's work within the format of this series, I have omitted discussion of other undeniably important topics already adequately treated in Peter Lisca's *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* and in the essays in Tedlock and Wicker's *Steinbeck and His Critics*.

Having dealt with general semantic aspects of my approach to the aforementioned three tendencies, it is necessary to elucidate each one. As pointed out by French, 'the best known allegories are the fables of Aesop and the parables of Christ, which embody much of the traditional wisdom of the two principal intellectual currents that mingle in Western thought; but it is doubtful whether any enduring work of art does not have some allegorical significance' (1961: 8-9). French is of the opinion that allegory is, nevertheless, distrusted in the twentieth century and that an increasing amount of literature strives to be uninvolved in its reporting – just as an increasing amount of painting no longer seeks exact verisimilitude. He sees the main difference between the

reporter and the allegorist expressed in the former's goal to collect facts, whereas the latter seeks a pattern in the event around which an account of it may be organised. In short, a reporter is concerned with what makes an event unique, while an allegorist is concerned with what makes it typical of recurrent patterns of human behaviour. Steinbeck falls within the latter category and seeks out those patterns of human behaviour such as the phalanx phenomenon in which a body of men may, for example, act as a single unit. This is best illustrated by the tactics of Roman soldiers who, when attacking a castle's battlements, would form 'the tortoise', with their shields covering their backs and heads. This single unit, made up of individual men with a common purpose, could then in unison accomplish more than a much larger crowd of disorganised individuals could ever hope to achieve. The same principle can be seen in action in an apparently negative sense when lemmings are triggered by some mysterious force in nature to gather in large numbers in a single body at a particular time and then to commit mass suicide by running headlong into the sea to drown. Two Steinbeck elements can be illustrated by this example. The first is the mass or phalanx action of the group, which is in this case apparently bent on self-destruction as opposed to the self-preservation tactics displayed by the Roman soldiers in my previous example. This behaviour in the lemmings can also be seen to be in the interests of self-preservation when one considers the possibility that they may act in this apparently self-destructive manner for the well-being of their species in order to combat the problems posed by over-population and by so doing, ensure survival.

The second Steinbeck element, namely non-teleological thinking, actually overlaps with what we refer to as uninvolved reporting. It can be illustrated by posing the typical question that a person with a teleological outlook on life would ask while witnessing the suicide of the lemmings, as opposed to the reaction of the non-teleological onlooker: the first person would be most likely to ask 'why?' while the second would wonder 'what happened?' and 'how did it take place?' Theologians especially resist the reaction of the non-teleological thinker who is concerned primarily not with what *should* be, or

could be, or might be, but rather with what actually is – attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what or how, instead of why*. Non-teleological thinking is also unpopular with theologians because it excludes any consideration of first causes, predestined goals, or special acts of providence, and because it may cast doubt on priestly authority. Differences arising between these two schools of thought are obvious and form the basis of many quarrels between science and theology. Non-teleological thought is favoured by 'pure' scientists but even they cannot adopt a 'pure non-teleological approach' if they act upon *what* they observe because they cannot hope to observe everything that *is*. It therefore follows that the scientist has to make a choice to observe *some* phenomena at the expense of others and as soon as this selection is made he is confronted with the question: 'Why did you choose this instead of that?' Even if he tries to avoid giving reasons for the choice by *expressing preference for a particular aspect of the question at hand*, he is expressing 'faith' in a pleasure principle. It therefore follows that even the non-teleological thinker must choose a 'theology' (even if just in opposition to any other theology) to give direction to his work (French, 1961:9).

Steinbeck's choice of 'theology' accords remarkably with that of the nineteenth-century American transcendentalists. Transcendentalism is an even more difficult concept to explain since it amounts to a set of imprecise, idealistic doctrines that demand that man be both intensely individualistic and selflessly altruistic at the same time. Steinbeck's 'faith' might best be summarised by the following lines from Walt Whitman's 'By Blue Ontario's Shore': 'How dare you place anything before a man?' An insistence on the primacy of human dignity is, according to French, the force that kept Steinbeck from committing himself to some Cause (1961:10). There is no definite evidence that Steinbeck was specifically influenced by transcendentalists such as Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, but transcendental ideas have been widespread among intellectuals in America and transcendentalism can be considered to be a characteristically American philosophy of life. French therefore feels that Steinbeck's enthusiasm for these ideas gives him a place in the development of a distinctive and distinguished American tradition.

The aforementioned three characteristics are consistently found in Steinbeck's fiction and, according to French, have had obvious effects upon his literary successes and failures:

When his personal experience has provided him with engrossing material, his propensity for allegory has provided a plan, his non-teleological thought a capacity for detachment, and his transcendental idealism a vigorous compassion that makes works like *The Red Pony* and *The Grapes of Wrath* both artistically and socially significant. On the other hand, when he has dealt with contrived material, the allegory clogs the narrative, the non-teleological effort at detachment seems merely carelessness or contempt, and the transcendental idealism becomes bombastic sentimentality (1961: 9).

However, in order to be in a position to pass judgement on Steinbeck's artistic merit or lack thereof, it is at least necessary to be able to recognise literary devices employed by him. Judging from the treatment which he received from some critics, however, this essential fact does not appear to be as obvious as one might hope. Joseph Fontenrose in *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation*, points out that in spite of the fact that Steinbeck sometimes clearly pointed out an allegorical theme in his work, some reviewers still failed to recognise it as an integral part of a particular work of fiction. As an example he quotes the obvious Arthurian theme, typical and recurrent in Steinbeck's fiction, which provides the central structure for *Tortilla Flat* but which was treated by some critics as being almost incidental to the narrative. In the prologue on the first page of the novel Steinbeck pointedly states that:

Danny's house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny's friends were not unlike the knights of it. And this is the story of how that group came into being,

of how it flourished and grew to be an organisation beautiful and wise ... (1935: 1).

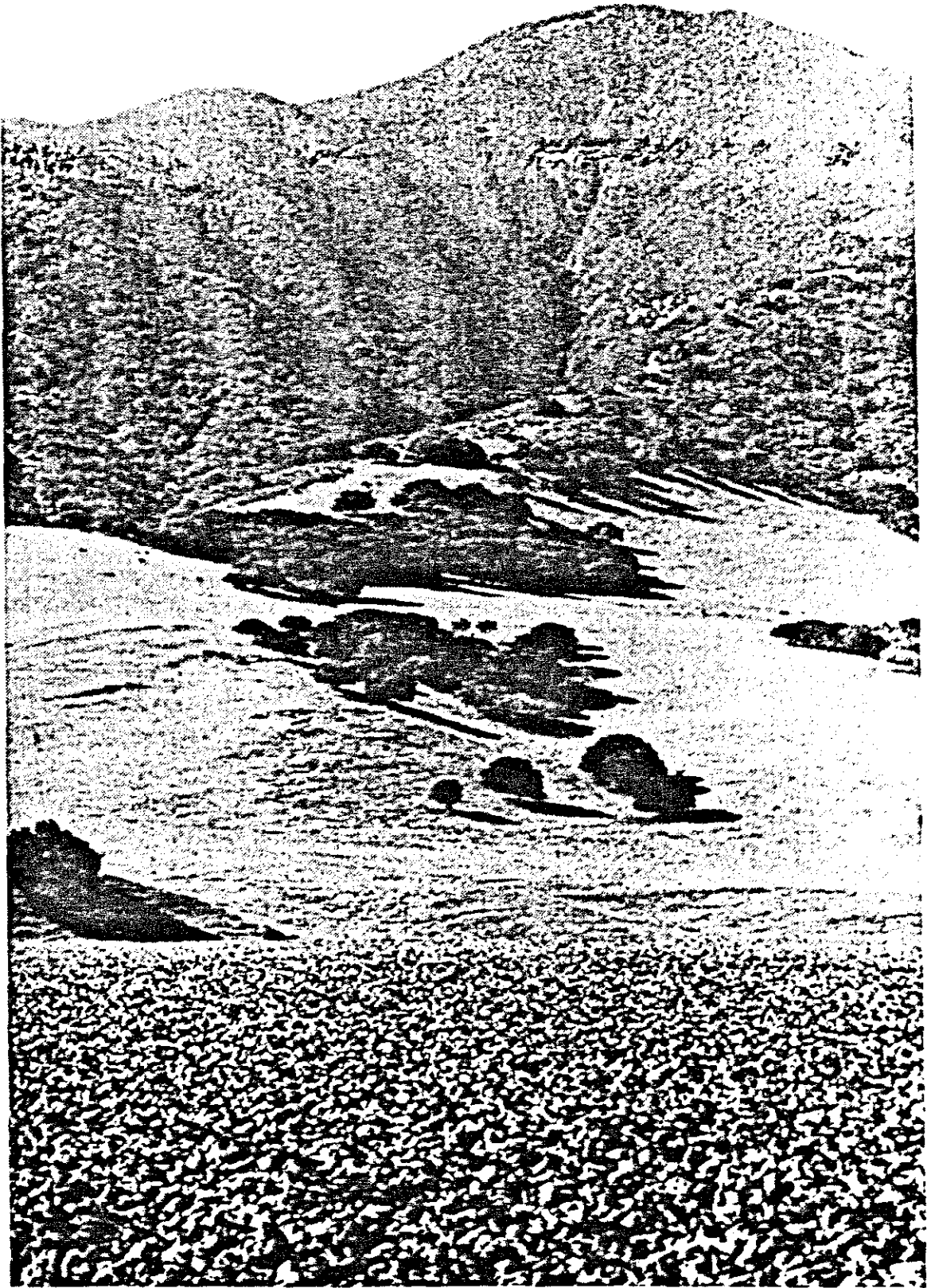
According to Fontenrose, 'this broad hint was ignored by readers of the manuscript and by reviewers of the book' (1963: 36). The failure of publishers' readers to recognise the Arthurian theme puzzled Steinbeck. In a letter to his agents, early in 1934, he said:

I had expected that the plan of the Arthurian cycle would be recognised, that my Gawaine and Launcelot that my Arthur and Galahad would be recognised ... However, I seem not to have made any of this clear (1963: 35).

When the book appeared in 1935 Steinbeck had provided it with chapter headings in the style of Caxton's *Malory*, and even as late as 1957 he clearly stated that *Tortilla Flat* was deliberately based on Malory's book. Yet, according to Fontenrose, 'critics [of *Tortilla Flat*] usually brush aside the Arthurian theme with the remark that there is nothing more to say about it than what Steinbeck has already said, that the structural similarities which Steinbeck mentioned are so general as to lack significance, and that it is vain to look for detailed parallels' (1963: 36).

Likewise, Steinbeck's organismic and ecological themes, however elegantly but clearly woven into the fabric of his fiction, were sometimes also 'misread' by critics such as Edmund Wilson as Steinbeck's 'animalism' and 'failure to create fully human characters' (1950: 151-152). It is therefore not surprising that other impercipient critics, following the example of Wilson (who was a leading critic at the time), would find no difficulty in viewing his non-teleological thinking as mere carelessness or contempt, and his transcendentalism as bombastic sentimentality. The sterling work of Warren French, Joseph Fontenrose, Peter Lisca and others, who identified and categorised quintessential elements in Steinbeck's fiction and who supplied the necessary terminology in dealing with them, obviates misinterpretation – at least for those readers

who intend to take Steinbeck seriously. It is the purpose of this dissertation to attempt to illustrate that such an approach can go a long way towards making a study of his fiction a truly enriching experience.



The Salinas Valley, looking toward the Santa Lucia Mountains.
(© 1983 Richard L Allman)

CHAPTER ONE

ANTECEDENTS: THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF STEINBECK'S APPROACH TO HIS WORK, INCLUDING ELEMENTS INTRINSIC TO HIS FICTION

I want to recreate a child's world, not of fairies and giants but of colors more clear than they are to adults, of tastes more sharp and of queer heart breaking feelings that overwhelm children in a moment. I want to put down the way 'afternoon felt' – and the feeling about a bird that sang in a tree in the evening.

John Steinbeck, in a remark made in 1936, before he began writing *The Red Pony*.

According to Peter Lisca, any full consideration of John Steinbeck and his work must begin with the fact that he was born (in 1902) and came to maturity in the Salinas Valley of California (1958: 21). His early boyhood environment left a deep and lasting impression on him that can be traced in almost all his works of fiction. Like the boy Jody in *The Red Pony*, who made a death symbol out of the black cypress trees under which the pigs were scalded, and a life symbol out of the mossy tub which caught spring water, Steinbeck was a sensitive boy (1958: 22). On the opening page of *East of Eden*, for example, he recounts as a personal childhood experience (shared by his alter ego character Jody), his love for the Gabilan Mountains to the east and fear of the Santa Lucia range towards the ocean in the west: 'dark and brooding – unfriendly and dangerous'. These mountains serve as prototypes for others encountered in Steinbeck's fiction that are either, 'full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation' like the Gabilans, or suggestive of death and danger, like the Santa Lucias (*East of Eden*, 1952: 70). In 'Flight', one of the stories from *The Long Valley*, Pepé flees to a mountain like the Santa Lucias where 'long before he entered the canyon [at the foot of the mountain], he had become an indefinite shadow'. His little sister Rosa explains that 'He has gone on a journey. He will never come back' (*The Long Valley*, 1938: 39 – 40).

Equally sinister mountains are encountered in *The Pearl*. Kino, his wife Juana and baby Coyotito, find scant refuge in 'the naked granite mountains, rising out of erosion rubble and standing monolithic against the sky' (*The Pearl*, 1945: 72-73). In *To A God Unknown* the protagonist, Joseph, takes his bride Elizabeth through a pass in the Santa Lucia mountains on the way to their new home and explains to her the significance of the moment: 'Here is a boundary. Yesterday we were married and it was no marriage. This is our marriage – through the pass – entering the [precarious] passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy' (*To a God Unknown*, 1933: 69). To the newly married couple this particular mountain pass represents an entrance to a new life together but for Elizabeth it has another poignant meaning: ' ... but I'll be leaving myself behind. I'll be thinking of myself standing here looking through at the new one who will be on the other side' (1933: 69). There are many more examples in Steinbeck's fiction of features in his childhood landscape re-appearing redolent with mythopoeic meaning. According to Joseph Fontenrose in *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1963), he drew from his native landscape a special quality of mind which has suffused his writings: 'It is like the quality visible in other Californian writers– Norris, London, Sterling, Jeffers– an awareness of and sympathy with the non-human, with the physical and biological environment in all its power and magnitude, dwarfing and absorbing humanity' (1963: 2-3).

Another important factor in Steinbeck's early years was his mother Olive's former position of school teacher and the love of books that she helped to instil in him. Olive taught in one-room schoolhouses at the age of seventeen, and like the re-appearing physical features in Steinbeck's childhood landscape, she is re-cast in the role of ever-young bluestocking and teacher in several of his novels. In *To a God Unknown*, for example, she appears as Elizabeth; in *The Pastures of Heaven*, as Molly Morgan; and in *East of Eden*, as herself. In *The Pastures of Heaven*, Molly Morgan is represented as reading to her pupils the novels of authors that Olive Steinbeck undoubtedly would have

introduced to her son: Sir Walter Scott, Zane Grey, James Oliver Curwood and Jack London. Junius Maltby, another character in this novel, reads to the boys from Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and carries copies of *Kidnapped* and *Travels With a Donkey* in his pockets. Commenting on his early reading, Steinbeck wrote to a friend in 1936 that he remembered 'certain books that were realer [sic] than experience— *Crime and Punishment* was like that and *Madame Bovary* and parts of *Paradise Lost* and things of George Eliot and *The Return of the Native*. I read all of these when I was very young and I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me'. The book that had the most profound effect on Steinbeck and on the development of Arthurian allegory in his fiction was Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur*. He wrote:

The first book that was my own—my very own— was the Caxton *Morte d'Arthur*. I got it when I was nine years old. Over the years I have been more affected by it than by anything else except possibly the *King James Version*. Later it caused a fairly intensive study of Anglo-Saxon, Old and Middle English – all of which I suspect have had a profound effect on my prose (1957).

The *Morte d'Arthur* caused Steinbeck to commit himself to more than 'a fairly intensive study of Old and Middle English'. It caused him, between 1956 and 1965, to pursue intensive research work in England as well as on the continent on primary and secondary sources related to the Winchester as well as the Caxton versions of the *Morte d'Arthur*. He spent months of study at a time in Somerset, Florence and Rome in preparation for a book that he was not destined to finish. He co-opted his friend Chase Horton to assist him with his research, especially in Europe. In the appendix to Steinbeck's unfinished book, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, which was published posthumously in 1976, Chase Horton wrote:

John Steinbeck wrote *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* from the Winchester manuscript of Malory's tales. His work is more than redaction, since John added to the original stories. It was written in Somerset, England, in 1958 – 9 and it is unfinished; it was not edited or corrected by John (1976: 297).

John Steinbeck's deep and abiding (and some have said uncritical) attachment to this legend is expressed, somewhat prophetically, in a letter dated 12 June 1961, to a friend:

All my life has been aimed at one book and I haven't started it yet. The rest has all been practice. Do you remember the Arthurian legend well enough to raise in your mind the symbols of Launcelot and his son Galahad? You see, Launcelot was imperfect and so he never got to see the Holy Grail. So it is with all of us. *The Grail* is always one generation ahead of us. But it is there and so we can go on bearing sons who will bear sons who may see *The Grail*. This is a most profound set of symbols – It is possible, through accident, that the words for my book may never be set down and I have been working and studying towards it for over forty years. Only the last of the process waits to be done – and it scares the hell out of me. (*A Life in Letters*, 1975: 859).

Between 1920 and 1925 Steinbeck intermittently attended Stanford University but he never fulfilled the requirements for graduation. Besides four years of English literature and composition, he took a year course in classical literature and was especially impressed by the Greek historians and Plato's dialogues. He also took an introductory course in zoology, to which he devoted a great deal of time and study in later years. He read very widely but unsystematically in English, American and European Literature. According to Joseph Fontenrose, 'he enjoyed Milton, Browning, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hardy, DH Lawrence, Jeffers, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, among others, including a

few writers for whom his enthusiasm later waned – James Branch Cabell, Norman Douglas, and Sherwood Anderson' (1963: 3).

Steinbeck extended his experience of the California countryside by spending holidays during his high school years as a hired hand on nearby ranches. He continued this practice as a university student and his work included jobs on road gangs and in a sugar mill where he mixed with the lower strata of society and discovered 'the genuine human qualities of humble people while working with them; he had no snobbery in him' (Fontenrose, 1963: 3). According to Joseph Warren Beach in *American Fiction: 1920 – 1940*, Steinbeck's genuine interest in working class people and with any social or industrial problem from the point of view of labour, prepared him to write *The Grapes of Wrath* which Beach sees as 'the finest example we have so far produced in the United States of the proletarian novel'. Beach concedes that there is likely to be a considerable element of propaganda in any novel with such a theme and such a point of view. He also points out the pitfalls when 'the spirit of propaganda does not carry with it the philosophical breadth, the imaginative power, or the mere skill in narrative which are so important for the production of a work of art'. He feels that Upton Sinclair, but not Steinbeck, is likely to fall into this category of writers when writing about working people because his interest in people is secondary:

One sometimes has the feeling with Sinclair that he strays with a theory and then labors to create characters who will prove it ... With Steinbeck, it is the other way round. He has been interested in people from the beginning, from long before he had any theory to account for their ways ... More especially he has shown himself fond of men who work for bread in the open air, on a background of fields and mountains. They have always appealed to him as individuals, and for something in them that speaks to his esthetic sense. He sees them strong and lusty, ready to fight and ready to make love. He likes to see the women nursing

their babies. He likes to see people enjoying their food, however coarse, and sharing it with others ... (1960: 327 – 328).

Steinbeck's willingness and even joy in doing manual labour as one of a group of working men gave him the ability to understand them and to write about them without condescension. His work on a labour gang which was building the first road below Big Sur, for example, familiarised him with the relatively unexplored country about which he was to write later on in *To A God Unknown* (1933). He then pushed wheelbarrows of concrete for the construction of Madison Square Gardens in 1925 before he found work as a reporter for the *New York American*. This experience provided background information which he later used in one of the tall tales about surreptitious marijuana growing in the Los Angeles Plaza gardens as related by a shady character in *Sweet Thursday* (1954: 16-17).

While at Stanford, Steinbeck also took classes in writing and began sending manuscripts to magazines. According to HT Moore as quoted by Fontenrose, he received only rejection slips in return (1963: 4). However, his short story "Fingers of Cloud," as well as a short satirical sketch, was published in *The Stanford Spectator*, while a few verse parodies appeared in *Stanford Lit*. After trying free-lance writing in New York for a short period of time in 1925, he returned, discouraged, to California. According to Fontenrose, for the next three years, periods of temporary employment alternated with periods devoted entirely to writing. He moved to San Francisco, Monterey, Salinas, Lake Tahoe.– writing novels that no publisher would buy. Finally, in 1929, McBride accepted and published *Cup of Gold*, a fictional biography of Henry Morgan the pirate, which Steinbeck wrote during two winters spent at Lake Tahoe, first as caretaker of a lodge and then as a worker in a fish hatchery. Although his novel earned him little money, its acceptance gave him the incentive to continue his writing. *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To A God Unknown* followed in 1932 and 1933. In 1933

and 1934 he sold five stories to the *North American Review*, including two parts of *The Red Pony*. Steinbeck's perseverance paid off when *Tortilla Flat* was published in 1935 and he was immediately accepted 'as an important American writer'. 'From that year Steinbeck became increasingly affluent as each successive novel became a bestseller' (Fontenrose, 1963: 4-5).

John Steinbeck's interest in zoology was re-kindled in 1931 when he met Edward Ricketts, owner and operator of a small commercial biological laboratory on the waterfront of Monterey, in a dentist's waiting room. He tells about the profound meaning that this close and personally significant friendship had for him in 'About Ed Ricketts,' written two years after Ricketts' death in a car accident in 1948. Ricketts provided the perfect sounding board for Steinbeck's many and varied ideas and theories, while he in turn, a devoted scientist and deep thinker, found a ready and responsive listener in Steinbeck. Steinbeck became a partner in the laboratory which was the scene of many uproarious parties also attended by the local bums, as described in *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954). Ed Ricketts, cast as Doc, is the main character in these two novels. Joel Hedgepeth, writing in *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work*, is of the opinion that Ricketts' accomplishments as scientist, as well as his heavy influence on Steinbeck, has been grossly understated. He also points to the seminal influence on Ricketts (and thus indirectly on Steinbeck) of the famed Chicago ecologist, WC Allee, and suggests that the Allee-Ricketts-Steinbeck relationship is fascinating and should occupy the attention of critics really desirous of understanding Steinbeck's fiction. Hedgepeth believes that Ricketts and Steinbeck were true naturalists, devoted to achieving a synthesis of the world around them (in Astro, Richard and Tetsumaro Hayashi (eds.). 1970: 7). According to Joseph Fontenrose, Steinbeck's association with Ricketts '...stimulated Steinbeck's interest in biology; out of it came that biological view of man which pervades the novels of Steinbeck's best period, and Ricketts was the

model for important characters in three novels (*In Dubious Battle*, *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday*) and a short story ('The Snake') (1963: 5).

John Steinbeck, in his youth, attended Episcopal Sunday School, since the Steinbeck family had adopted his mother's family church. There and at home he acquired a taste for scripture which, according to Fontenrose, 'had a profound effect upon his literary style and form' (1963: 3). In his introduction to *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, Steinbeck says that as a child, some literature 'was in the air' around him: 'The Bible I absorbed though my skin. My uncles exuded Shakespeare, and *Pilgrim's Progress* was mixed with my mother's milk' (1976: 11). He was weaned of regular church attendance during his student days, however, as reported by Peter Lisca:

While working in a haberdashery store in Oakland, he lived with a fellow-employee who took him to church one Sunday, where Steinbeck embarrassed his host by taking vociferous objection to the preacher's sermon, breaking out from the congregation with 'Feed the body, and the soul will take care of itself', and 'I don't think much of preaching ... Go on. You're getting paid for it' (1958: 25).

While working on various ranches he frequently argued socialism with his fellow labourers although he believed that man's innate stupidity and greed made that form of government improbable (1958: 25). In his more mature years, Steinbeck sometimes attended church – but with an air of amusement, as expressed in this passage from *Travels With Charley*:

Sunday morning, in a Vermont town, my last day in New England, I shaved, dressed in a suit, polished my shoes, whited my sepulchre, and looked for a church to attend. Several I eliminated for reasons I do not remember, but on

seeing a John Knox church I drove into a side street and parked Rocinante out of sight, gave Charley [his dog] his instructions about watching the truck, and took my way with dignity to a church of blindingly white ship lap ... The prayers were to the point, directing the attention of the Almighty to certain weaknesses and undevine [sic] tendencies I know to be mine and could only suppose were shared by others ... The service did my heart, and I hope my soul, some good ... It is our practice now, at least in the large cities, to find from our psychiatric priesthood that our sins aren't really sins at all but accidents that are set in motion by forces beyond our control. There was no such nonsense in this church. The minister, a man of iron with tool-steel eyes and a delivery like a pneumatic drill, opened up with prayer and reassured us that we were a pretty sorry lot ... He spoke of hell as an expert ... For some years now God has been a pal to us, practising togetherness, and that causes the same emptiness as a father does playing softball with his son. But this Vermont God cared enough about me to go to a lot of trouble kicking the hell out of me. He put my sins in a new perspective ... [He] gave them some size and bloom and dignity ... I felt so revived in spirit that I put five dollars in the plate ... and shook hands warmly with the minister and as many of the congregation as I could ... It gave me such a lovely sense of evil-doing that ... I even considered beating Charley to give him some satisfaction too, because Charley is only a little less sinful than I am (1962: 71-2).

Although Steinbeck had little patience with the 'rigmarole' of formal Christianity, or rather 'churchianity', he looked upon it benignly as practised by others as long as they allowed him, as expressed by the protagonist Joseph in *To A God Unknown*, to also 'just do the things I do'. The 'things' referred to, in this case, included druid-like rituals such as the offering of libations to a tree that Joseph regarded as a kind of repository of his father's spirit to which he also 'offered' his child, by placing it in a fork formed by the

limbs. The same protagonist later on in the novel also reveals his acceptance of other beliefs such as the divinity and mediatorship of Jesus Christ when he 'said in his mind': 'Christ in his little time on the nails carried within His body all the suffering that ever was, and in Him it was undistorted'. These are not the thoughts of an irreligious man, and Steinbeck was profoundly religious in his own way: According to Bracher, his belief in the ultimate unity of all things in life leads to a mystical unity which can be equated to a religious attitude in life (1957: 183-96). The element of mysticism may have been reinforced by the influence of his mother during his childhood, for according to Jackson J Benson, she 'had the sense that all things about us are enchanted, if we had but the eyes to see' (Benson 1984: 8). Being the daughter of Samuel Hamilton who hailed from Ireland and who is depicted as being 'fey' in the best Irish sense of the word in *East of Eden*, this may explain where she derived her sense of enchantment from. However, according to Benson, she believed that 'there was a potential for magic everywhere and in every experience, and just as there was good and bad people, there were good and bad places – and special places' (1984: 8). The secret grove where a spring flows from a moss-covered rock, as depicted in *To A God Unknown*, is such a place. It becomes a mystical place of offering, an altar, where Elizabeth accidentally loses her life and where Joseph deliberately sacrifices his in order to find ultimate unity with nature – the god unknown – so that the parched land can be healed by life-giving rain.

Ultimate unity with all things can be considered to be Steinbeck's 'religion' as expressed by Jim Casey in *The Grapes of Wrath* when he says, 'There was hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy' (1939: 110). This religious view was rooted in Steinbeck's youth and its development can be traced in all his works. According to R S Hughes in *John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction*, he made the most explicit statement on this mystical oneness of the animate and inanimate in his *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (Hughes, 1989: 192). Steinbeck wrote:

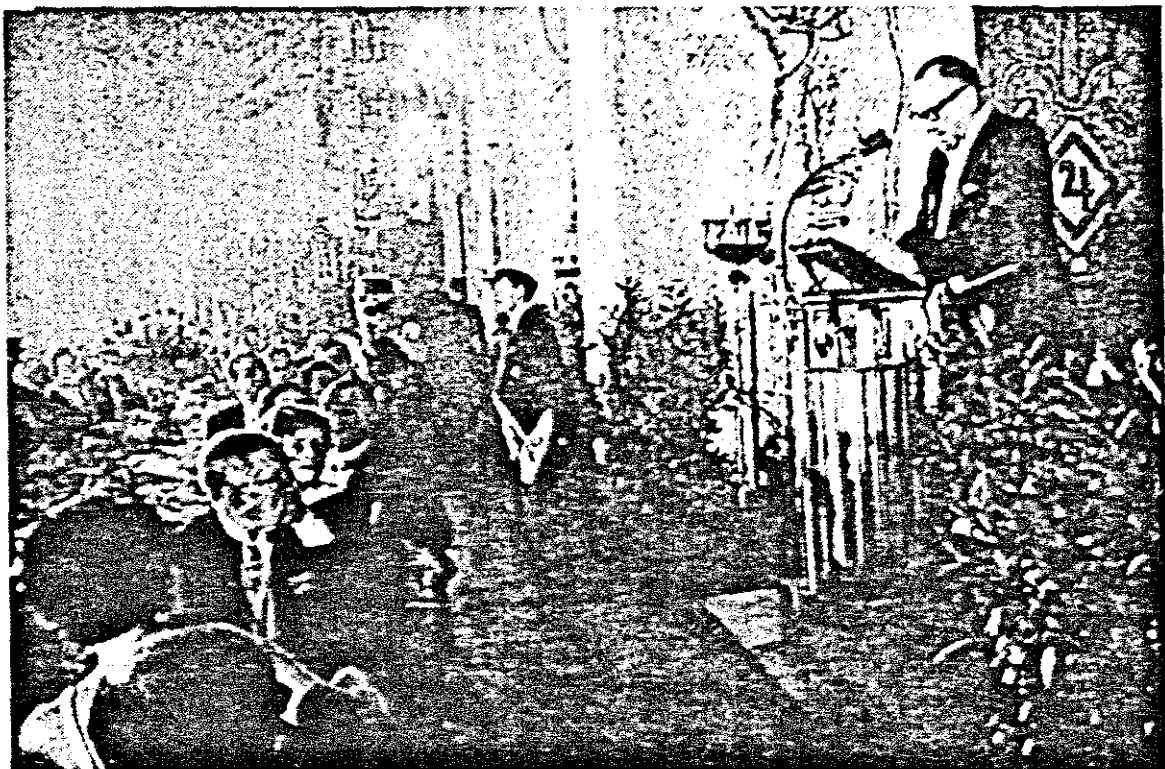
... groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it ... And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call *religious*, most of the *mystical outcrying* which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable. This is a simple thing to say, but the profound feeling of it made a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and in his own voice discovered and affirmed with astonishment the knowledge that all things are one and that one thing is all things (1951: 216-217).



Receiving the Nobel Prize.

(Courtesy Mrs EG Ainsworth, John Steinbeck Library, Salinas, Steinbeck Archives)

Delivering the Nobel Prize speech *(Courtesy Mrs EG Ainsworth, John Steinbeck Library, Salinas, Steinbeck Archives)*



CHAPTER TWO

STEINBECK'S ARTISTIC MERIT: THE DEBATE OF THE THIRTIES AND BEYOND

A writer out of loneliness is trying to communicate like a distant star sending out signals. He isn't telling or teaching or ordering. Rather he seeks to establish a relationship of meaning, of feeling, of observing. We are lonesome animals. We spend all life trying to be less lonesome. One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say – and to feel – 'Yes, that's the way it is, or at least that's the way I feel it. You're not as lonely as you thought'. It is so hard to be clear. Only a fool will be wilfully obscure ... To finish is sadness to a writer – a little death. He puts the last word down and it is done. But it isn't really done. The story goes on and leaves the writer behind, because no story is ever done.

John Steinbeck (1956).

Although Steinbeck's name is today firmly established in the annals of American literature, his works and even his person have had to withstand many attacks from sometimes impercipient critics over the years. It is somewhat of a paradox that this writer who was accused, at various times, of being 'a communist, a fascist, a puritan, and one of the most immoral men that ever published a book in the United States' (Benson, 1984: iv), received some of the highest accolades that were bestowed upon writers during this century. These include the Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal (received twice: 1935 and 1936), The Drama Critics Circle Award (1937), one of Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Year Awards (1937), the Pulitzer Prize (1939), election to the American Academy of Letters (1948), Book of the Month Club Selection (1961), the King Haakon VII (Norway) Cross (1963), and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1962). Steinbeck also became the trusted friend of Presidents J F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson as well as of several other luminaries world-wide. Despite these accolades, his credentials for receiving the Nobel Prize, for example, were questioned on numerous occasions.

The extensive debate about Steinbeck's artistic merit as expressed in his fiction started in

the Thirties and was primarily based on his novels *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). His first three full-scale novels, *Cup of Gold* (1929), *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), and *To a God Unknown* (1933), at that stage, attracted very little attention from the critics. Warren French (1961:21) reports that the few newspaper critics who reviewed *Cup of Gold* refused to take it seriously and Steinbeck himself, in a letter (dated 5 December 1929) to his friend A. Grove Day, refers to it as 'the Morgan [central figure in *Cup of Gold*] atrocity' (Steinbeck and Wallsten, 1975:15). Steinbeck also calls the novel 'an immature experiment written for the purpose of getting all the wise cracks (known by sophomores as epigrams) and all the autobiographical material ... out of my system' (1975: 17). French (1961: 47) remarks that since little attention had been paid to Steinbeck's *Cup of Gold* and *The Pastures of Heaven*, *To a God Unknown* did not impress the public of the early Thirties as the surprise that it is to one who today reads the novels in order of publication. It was therefore also given short shrift by the critics of the time because it was viewed in the light of the other two 'inferior' novels. There were some critics, however, who recognised *The Pastures of Heaven* as more than a collection of short stories but they mostly failed to perceive its overall design as a novel of great depth. During the next twenty years there were some critics who viewed Steinbeck's fiction as a great contribution to American literature, but many others saw him as a minor writer, a California regionalist who wrote with some distinction, but, because of his many artistic flaws, failed to achieve greatness (Swan, 1974: 1). This debate was marked by contradictory critical reactions to identical phenomena in Steinbeck's work and led him, in 1955, to respond in an essay entitled 'Critics from a Writer's Viewpoint' when he was asked by the authors/compiler of *Steinbeck and His Critics*, E.W. Tedlock and C.V. Wicker, to contribute to their book-in-the-making. Steinbeck wrote:

Recently my publisher, with the best intentions in the world, gave me a scrapbook of all or nearly all the criticism of a volume of mine. On first reading, this compendium was confusing. In many cases one critic cancelled out another ... I

became depressed after first looking into this scrapbook, for it seemed to me that there were no laws of criticism. Read all together one had an appalling sense of anarchy (Tedlock and Wicker, 1961: 48).

Steinbeck's dismay is understandable as the issues about which critics blew hot and cold were often of a sociological rather than an aesthetic nature and their critical reactions were often extremely limited, not only in intention, but also in coverage (Lisca, 1958: 3-20). These issues included Steinbeck's purported lack of moral sense, his sentimentality and use of emotion, his ideological suasion and use of propaganda, his demagoguery and lack of artistic integrity, his confusion of philosophy, and his 'animalism' or inability to create fully-human characters (Swan, 1974: 1-2). These views are briefly illustrated in the following sampling of critiques.

The Grapes of Wrath, for instance, caused an outburst of righteous indignation and moral outrage when it appeared in 1939, and will best serve as an example of the mixed reaction to his early work. Steinbeck's lack of moral sense was sternly criticised in Samuel Sillen's *Censoring the Grapes of Wrath* (1939: 3-7), Congressman Lyle H Boren's speech to the House of Representatives (1940: 27-29), and in the 1939 *Commonweal* article *Red Meat and Red Herrings* which appeared in *A Case Book on The Grapes of Wrath* (Donohue, 1968: 27-29). This initial expression of consternation certainly had its effect on subsequent critical reaction to Steinbeck and even as late as 1959 his novel was still being condemned for its indecency, vulgarity and sexual license, as pointed out by K D Swan (1974: 2). In *The Grapes of Wrath Reconsidered*, Walter Fuller Taylor expresses the opinion that this novel, which is supposed to expose a moral wrong, itself endorses moral indulgence, reiterates a philosophy of sexual promiscuity, embraces language for the sake of shock and revulsion, and ridicules organised religion and the values of the middle class through the use of 'insidious propaganda devices of epithet, innuendo, and hostile connotation' (Taylor, 1968: 185-194). Other critics brought similar charges against *The Grapes of Wrath*, but Lincoln R. Gibbs in *John Steinbeck: Moralist* justifies

Steinbeck's usage of the aforementioned unsavoury devices and states that 'Earth is an obscene planet, if you choose'. If Steinbeck is to be blamed for pointing this out, then so should literary masters such as Chaucer, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Fielding, Whitman and others who recognised animal appetites and physiological facts in their works (Gibbs, 1957: 93). Gibbs furthermore points out that Steinbeck does not wallow in filth because he loves it: his supposed licence of speech does not spring from a degenerate mind but from the heart that rebels against cant and injustice. Steinbeck's humanism may be regarded as fantastic and his hatred of hypocrisy and prudery may carry him to extremes, but his human sympathies and artistic perceptions rise above what is perceived as his lax morality (1957: 97-100).

Steinbeck has also often been accused of being too sentimental and Blake Nevius' charge in his essay 'Steinbeck: One Aspect' (1949), which appeared in *Steinbeck and His Critics* (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957:205), is typical: 'No other writer of comparable reputation has resorted to the sentimental evasion of Steinbeck' (cf. Nevius, 1949). The loss of sentimental illusion is a favourite theme with the American novelists. This disillusionment is often seen as a positive and even redemptive force. Illusion is consequently seen as an obstacle to the liberation of the individual mind and personality. Nevius, however, feels that Steinbeck takes the opposite view: illusion is a necessity or a saving grace in order for life to have meaning and value. Grim reality is, hence, inconsistent with happiness and peace of mind. This is illustrated by the happy inhabitants of *The Pastures of Heaven* who, in confronting reality and disenchantment, are driven from their peaceful valley. Steinbeck's non-teleological or 'is' mode of thinking (which will subsequently be discussed in detail) is furthermore blamed for another form of sentimentality, namely his unwillingness to assign positive blame for evil. However, Joseph Warren Beach, also writing in *Steinbeck and His Critics* (1957:80-91) defends Steinbeck against charges of sentimentality by arguing that he is a realist. He likens Steinbeck's brand of realism to that of Chekov who endows his characters with feelings, sensibilities and aspirations reflective of fundamental existential ambiguity. Beach is of the

opinion that Steinbeck maintains a delicate balance in the treatment of his themes and characters. He quotes as an example the boy Jody in *The Red Pony* who struggles to find a balance in his world that is burdened with serious responsibilities, hard work, cruelties and a stern father on the one hand, and the joys and enchantments of boyhood on a farm, on the other. Jody is helped to achieve this balance by a hired hand, Billy Buck, who has to walk his own tight-rope of promises made (to Jody). Beach points out many examples in other novels where Steinbeck succeeds in maintaining the same delicate balance and praises him for his expressive style, artistic sensibility and extraordinary versatility.

Steinbeck was also frequently labelled as a propagandist, and as one guilty of compromising his art, as in the case of his enthusiastic support for the cause of the sharecroppers in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Christopher Isherwood in *The Tragedy of Eldorado* poses the question whether propaganda can produce good art (Isherwood, 1968:78). He concedes that all art involves propaganda, but makes a distinction between successful art (which involves the values of a culture and leaves the reader to make his own judgements), and imperfect art (which involves overt propaganda, such as is allegedly employed in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*). He accuses Steinbeck, in his defence of the cause of the sharecroppers and his indignation against the wrongs they suffer, of being guilty 'throughout this book, of such personal, schoolmasterish intrusions upon the reader'. He is of the opinion that overt propaganda defeats its own artistic ends because 'the politico-sociological case is general, the artistic instance is particular' (1968: 79). Joseph Warren Beach deals with the same subject in 'John Steinbeck: Art and Propaganda' (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957: 250), but comes to different conclusions. He recognises that propaganda can pose a threat to serious art, because 'the spirit of propaganda does not carry with it the philosophical breadth, the imaginative power, or the mere skill in narrative which are so important for the production of a work of art' (1957: 250). Beach feels that a writer who has the skilful gifts of a propagandist is one who often holds a theory and then sets about creating the characters to prove the theory. In other words, the writer's interest in people is secondary. Beach states that Upton Sinclair is such

a writer but not John Steinbeck. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example, Steinbeck's interest in people is primary and his theory is only an attempt to account for their plight. Beach comes to the conclusion that the book is not a communist tract but literary art which has its basis in parable, allegory and Biblical parallels, and which dramatises the essential dignity of the human spirit. As a literary work of art, the novel gains in emotional power by dealing with urgent social problems. Aesthetically, the novel is endowed with imaginative power and maintains a creative tension between the real and the ideal; it employs the principle of selection for effect; it develops individualised situations and characters, and it has universal meaning and value because it depicts man in conflict with the forces of nature which cause hunger and deprivation. (1957: 250-265). The question of Steinbeck's popularity, and the compatibility of mass appeal with first rate art is discussed by Maxwell Geismar in his essay entitled 'John Steinbeck: Of Wrath or Joy' (1942), which appeared in *A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath*, edited by Agnes McNeill Donohue (1968: 141). Geismar finds Steinbeck lacking in artistic merit and calls him a sociological catalyst who, like Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, '... is able to sway continents and for a moment seduce destiny herself' (1968: 141). Steinbeck's art is relegated to the 'second order' because, although he is closer to the American audience than any other writer, the mass mind is unable to identify with literature of the first order: 'The perfection of first-rate art is in one sense sterile, a high peak in itself yet too remote for the majority of us to exist upon, being unable to breathe in the rarefied climate of pure wisdom' (1968: 140-141). Although Geismar concedes that Steinbeck has the talent of a first-rate writer, he is of the opinion that Steinbeck exploits those characteristics which make for popular appeal: his sentimentality, his rhapsody, his choice of whimsical characters, his affirmations of faith and respect in average humanity, his anger at social injustice, his glamour, theatrics, and simplicity of view tend to endear him to the American reader. To Geismar, Steinbeck's impact on society is to a large extent due to his imperfections (1968: 134-142). B R McElderry, Jr., in his 1944 essay '*The Grapes of Wrath* in the Light of Modern Critical Theory' (Donohue, 1968: 126-129) examines Steinbeck's novel in terms of the writer's conscious and sub-conscious intent, in terms of the book's extent or reader interest, and

in terms of its inner unity. McElderry is of the opinion that a novel, in securing reader interest in terms of the principles of modern critical theory, must not violate or impair its basic intent if it is to have inner unity: 'In *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example, it might be a question as to whether freedom of language is always essential to the intent, or whether a few "sons of bitches" are sometimes thrown in to increase the extent [sic] of the novel among certain readers' (1968: 126-129). After an analyses of the novel McElderry is satisfied to declare that Steinbeck's work has inner unity and that it also fulfils other requirements of modern critical theory (i.e., New Critical Standards): as art it is an irreducible activity, complete within itself ; as art it is not only a corroboration of our sense experience but an expansion of it. Although McElderry recognises certain weaknesses in the novel, such as its sentimentality and the ending which is symbolically consistent but not sufficiently plausible to communicate the basic intent, he does not feel that these weaknesses are of much importance. He is convinced that Steinbeck does not sacrifice his art for the sake of popularity and he sees *The Grapes of Wrath* as a creative work of art in the best sense of the word and one of the best novels of the twentieth century (1968: 129-133).

According to Kenneth Dale Swan (1974:7) the debate over Steinbeck's personal artistic philosophy tended to be like the other controversies, heated and polemical. This controversy was also marked by its universality in that almost every critic either attacked or defended Steinbeck's philosophic view of life while widely disagreeing on what it was. Notable discussions on this subject dealt with by Swan (1974) include the views expressed by Freeman Champney in 'John Steinbeck, Californian' (1947), Lincoln R. Gibbs in 'John Steinbeck: Moralistic' (1942), Stanley Edgar Hyman in 'Some Notes on John Steinbeck' (1942), Blake Nevius in 'Steinbeck: One Aspect' (1949), Frederic Ives Carpenter in 'The Philosophical Joys' (1941) and Woodburn Ross in 'John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars' (1946) (all in Tedlock and Wicker, 1957). Freeman Champney, according to Swan (1974:7), understands the philosophical relationship between Steinbeck's *The Log From The Sea of Cortez* (1941) and his works of fiction, but Champney's re-statement

of it in his criticism is in negative terms. He is of the opinion that Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking is basically 'a mixture of philosophical relativism, the refusal of the scientist to be dogmatic about a hypothesis, and moral fatalism' (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957: 150-151). According to Champney, this philosophy leads to nothing creative or productive based on a vision of what might be. It adopts the Oriental passivism which discourages man from doing very much about his plight, stifles thought, and leads to a regressive search which ends in pure mysticism. To Champney, Steinbeck is anti-intellectual and writes primarily about non-intellectuals. Furthermore, he seems to have the same condescending attitude towards the typical professional intellectual as he has towards the middle-class. Steinbeck's chief contribution, accordingly, is the charting of a no-man's-land between the rational and sub-rational. Champney's conclusion is that 'Steinbeck's *Sea of Cortez* musings suggest that he has grown weary of trying to make responsible sense of life ... ' (1957: 151). Woodburn Ross' 'John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars', like Frederick Ives Carpenter's 'The Philosophical Joads', is, according to Swan (1974: 8) 'a more sympathetic attempt to relate Steinbeck's ideas to the ideas of thinkers before him'. Carpenter traces the influences of Emerson, Whitman and James on Steinbeck (1957: 244-249), while Ross is mainly interested in the parallel between Auguste Comte's ideas of logical positivism and Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking. Comte and Steinbeck seem to agree that the search for first or final causes is fruitless. Both see the rational human mind as exercising little control or influence over human conduct. Both stress the virtues of the poor and dispossessed, and both are concerned about social reforms. Steinbeck, however, differs from Comte in his advocacy of human rights as against Comte's concern with duties. Referring to this difference in opinion between Steinbeck and the nineteenth century Comte, Ross states that Steinbeck seems to be in harmony with much twentieth century thought (1957: 178-182). Ross, however, sees a contradiction in Steinbeck's philosophy which involves scientific thinking on the one hand and an affection for the natural world on the other. Such an affection seriously affects Steinbeck's rational, objective stance but in turn gives birth to the conflicting claims of reason and intuition which often constitute the basic problem of a Steinbeck novel.

Concerning Steinbeck's merit, Ross states:

But the contempt for Steinbeck as a half-abandoned writer of slick entertainment ... is completely unwarranted. Steinbeck's difficulty is that ... he is a man of two worlds. As a believer of the inductive, scientific method he must record what he sees, he must write realistically. But as a man of powerful affections and intuitions he must reflect irrational attitudes which are justifiable only in terms of the desires of the human spirit. He is therefore at the same time brutal and tender, rational and irrational, concrete and abstract. His imagination provides for humanity a home in the universe which his senses do not perceive (1957: 178).

An approach to the problem posed by Steinbeck's alleged animalism and inability to create fully human characters was spearheaded by Edmund Wilson's contribution to *A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath* (Donohue, 1968) entitled 'The Boys in the Back Room: Notes on California Novelists' (1950). Wilson blames Steinbeck's interest in biology and his tendency to symbolise human life in animal terms as a contributory factor to his purported failure in developing fully human characters. Wilson contends that Steinbeck does not raise animal imagery to the level of human beings but reduces human character to animal level instead and consequently deals with moral issues on a primitive level only. According to Wilson, Steinbeck in his fiction almost always deals with the lower animals or with humans so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level (1950:151-152). As an example he states that in *The Grapes of Wrath* the 'Okies' are like animated puppets 'put through their paces'. Steinbeck's philosophy of group-man is viewed by Wilson as unsatisfactory: 'It is as if human sentiments and speeches had been assigned to a flock of lemmings on their way to throw themselves into the sea' (1950: 156). Peter Lisca in his *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* later pointed out that Wilson's view of Steinbeck's so-called 'animalism' had an influence that 'can be traced through the body of Steinbeck criticism like a radioactive particle' (1958:6). The lasting effects of such a distorted view are especially ironical in view of Wilson's own admission that he had only

read five of Steinbeck's eight books that were in print at the time. A more balanced and extensive analysis of Steinbeck's biological thought is found in Frederick Bracher's contribution to *Steinbeck and His Critics* (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957:183-196) entitled 'Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man' (1948). Bracher sees more than avoidance of 'cause' thinking in Steinbeck's approach to human behaviour. He points out that, first, Steinbeck's central metaphor is the tide pool which represents the relationship between man and the teeming life in the sea. Second, Steinbeck is fascinated by the biological mysteries of life. Third, Steinbeck's belief in the ultimate unity of all things in life leads to a mystical unity, which can be equated with a religious attitude to life. In the fourth place, Steinbeck's typical biologist hero in his novels (such as Doc in *Cannery Row*) corroborates his biological approach to life. In the fifth place, Steinbeck's group or phalanx man theory encompasses the idea that the group constitutes a separate 'animal' that performs certain functions which the individual does not perform. Lastly, man's ability to survive and to adapt to new conditions is a central idea in Steinbeck's work. Bearing these ideas in mind, Bracher shows that Steinbeck's typical hero figures are characters such as Slim in *Of Mice and Men*, Juan Chicoy in *The Wayward Bus*, Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Doc in *Cannery Row*. They are confident as well as skilful and have a strong potential for survival. The Steinbeck hero, according to Bracher, transcends simple biological virtues and attains mystical proportions:

To be aware of the whole thing and to accept one's part in it is, for Steinbeck, the saving grace which may lift man out of the tide pool. His heroes ... George, saving Lennie from the mob; Doc, committing the idiot boy who loves him; Juan Chicoy, turning back to pull the bus out of the mud; even Camille Oakes, wearily enduring her attractiveness ... all share the main 'non-teleological' virtue: the ability to see what 'is' (which includes what needs to be done) with 'the love and understanding of instant acceptance' (1957: 183-196).

The typical Steinbeck hero, according to Bracher, oscillates between the tidal pool and the

stars. According to K.D. Swan (1974: 10-11) the authors/compiler of *Steinbeck and his Critics* (1957), E.W. Tedlock and C.W. Wicker, felt that given such a wide-ranging debate on the artistic merit of the fiction of John Steinbeck, it is necessary to call for a more detached analysis of the complexity of Steinbeck's art. The need for this, Tedlock and Wicker felt, was shown not only by the widely conflicting opinions on the merit of Steinbeck's art but also by the fact that most critics tended to evaluate Steinbeck by the extent to which his philosophy was consistent with their own. Tedlock and Wicker were especially concerned about the fact that the critics seemed to be chiefly concerned with Steinbeck's philosophy to the detriment of the explication of the text, symbol and structure, which differed from their treatment of Faulkner and Hemingway, for example. They also believed that if the principles of the New Criticism were to be applied to the work of John Steinbeck, future critics would find him to be 'an artist with an artist's intentions, methods and stature' (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957: xii).

K.D. Swan (1974:11) is of the opinion that Peter Lisca and Warren French responded to the call of Tedlock and Wicker and have attempted, each in his own way, to sort through the critical confusion of Steinbeck and to determine his artistic merit by applying the principles of the New Criticism. Swan contends that these two literary critics have not only written extensively about the literature of John Steinbeck but have also contributed to a clearer understanding and a more profound appreciation of his work. Swan furthermore believes that the work of these two critics, along with those of others – Joseph Fontenrose, Lester Marks, Tetsumaro Hyashi, and Richard Astro – have encouraged a new and more positive image of Steinbeck in the world of contemporary literature. In several books and in numerous articles, Lisca and French have shown that Steinbeck at his best is a significant artist and that his works, in Lisca's words, have 'those qualities of insight and discipline which are essential to the creation of great art' (Lisca 1958: 20).

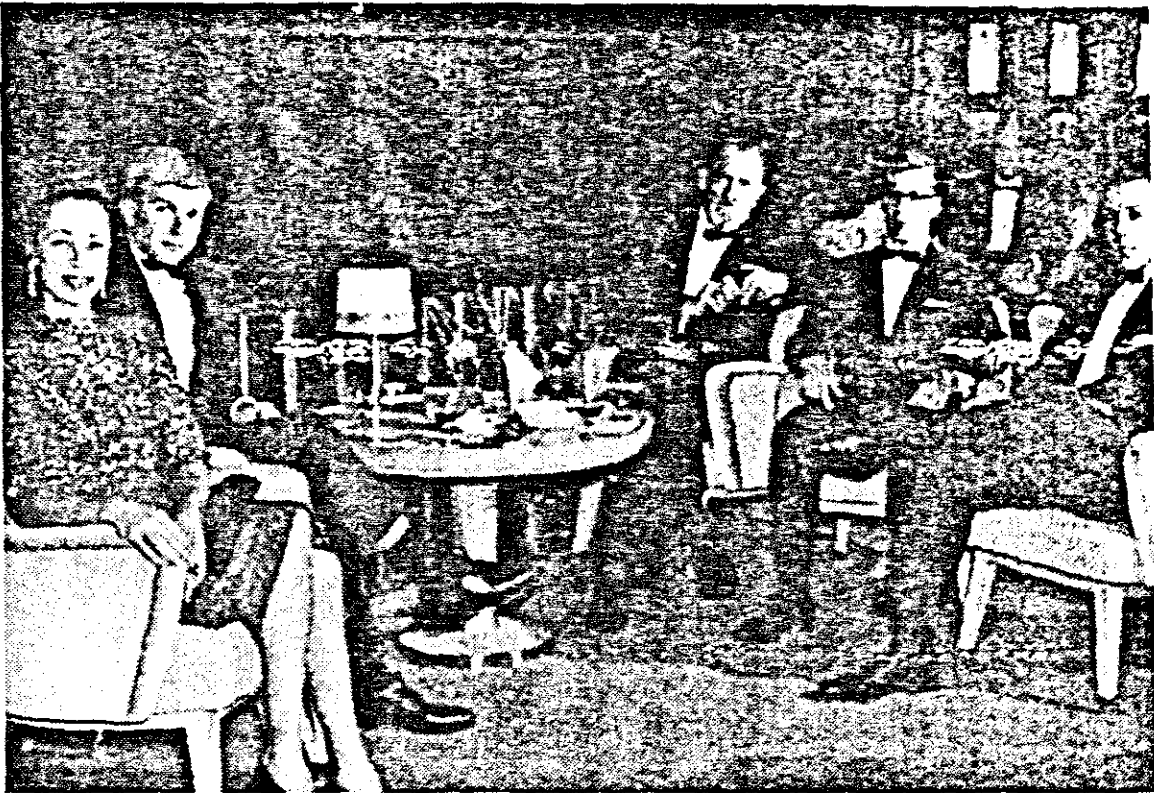
Peter Lisca's book, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (1958), which is also the first full-length study of Steinbeck, is in Swan's opinion considered by many scholars to be a

landmark in Steinbeck criticism (1974: 11). According to Swan, Lisca's 'wide-ranging, thoroughly critical study of Steinbeck turns back the tide of negative criticism and establishes Steinbeck as a significant artist', while Warren French 'emphasises, clarifies, and illustrates the central characteristics of Steinbeck's fiction. Together, Lisca and French, writing for different reasons and from different viewpoints, structure a literary dialogue which has far-reaching influence on other critics and which contributes substantially to the analysis, interpretation and fair judgement of Steinbeck's fiction' (1974:119). Their approach stands in stark contrast to the often biased, uninformed and sometimes even trite pronouncements made with regard to Steinbeck's fiction by certain critics in the early years.

Ten years after the publication in 1974 of Kenneth Dale Swan's doctoral thesis which, *inter alia*, set out to affirm the positions of Lisca and French as the doyens of Steinbeck criticism, a major work on Steinbeck saw the light. This was Jackson J Benson's definitive biography titled *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (1984). This truly monumental work by a recognised Steinbeck scholar as well as author and editor of several works on Ernest Hemingway, reveals heretofore unknown dimensions of Steinbeck the man and events of his life as he pursued his artistic vocation. In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith, a close friend of Steinbeck's quoted on the cover of the book: 'There will not be another book like it nor will we need one'. Carlos Baker (again quoted on the cover) also recognised the lasting value of Benson's biography: 'Benson has achieved an arrangement of the cradle-to-grave events which will prove very valuable, and projected a far fuller and more detailed picture of John Steinbeck's personality and actions and interests than anyone else has done or probably ever will do'.

It is the opinion of the author of this dissertation that the kind of background such as provided by Benson's book, and the posthumous insights provided by Steinbeck's collected letters (Steinbeck and Wallsten, 1975), were needed before a truly representative picture of the writer and his work could emerge. Together with the works of

critics who employ techniques provided by the New Criticism, such as Lisca, French and others, Benson's biography and Steinbeck's collected letters opened up new approaches to studies on Steinbeck. These approaches continue to confirm that, contrary to the aforementioned opinions of critics such as Maxwell Geismar, Steinbeck's work is of an enduring quality that refuses to be relegated to the 'second order'. The considerable corpus of criticism generated by his fiction, the many scholarly works about him and his approach to literature, as well as thriving Steinbeck organisations in America and Japan with world-wide membership, bear testimony to this.



Elaine, Terrence McNally, John, John IV, and Thom begin "around the world" tour with passage on SS *Rotterdam* to Europe, 1961 (Courtesy ElaineSteinbeck)

Mr and Mrs James Roosevelt, John, Elaine, with President Lyndon Johnson en route to Stevenson funeral in Air Force One (The John Steinbeck Collection, Stanford University Libraries)



CHAPTER THREE

EXAMPLES OF STEINBECK'S APPROACH TO HIS WORK AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES, INCLUDING POLITICS, ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF HIS LITERATURE AND PERSON

Everyone is related to the world through something. I through words – perhaps inordinately but there it is. But before I stopped writing [during a spell of writer's block in 1958], words had become treacherous and untrustworthy to me. And then, without announcement they began assembling quietly and they slipped down my pencil to the paper – not the tricky, clever, lying, infected words – but simpler, stately, beautiful, old with dignity and fresh and young as that bird who wakes me with a song as old as the world, and announces every day as a new thing in creation. My love and respect and homage for my language is coming back. Here are proud words and sharp words and words as dainty as little girls and stone words needing no adjectives as crutches. And they join hands and dance beauty on the paper ... I am overwhelmed with joy because something in me has let go and the clear blue flame of my creativeness is released. I am uplifted but not humbled because I have paid for this with the currency of confusion and little sufferings and it is mine, sealed and registered ... It makes me want to scream with a kind of orgiastic triumph.

John Steinbeck, in a letter written from Somerset, England, in 1959 (*A Life in Letters*, 1975: 626-628).

John Steinbeck, as quoted above, re-discovered the ecstasy that creative writing held for him after he had managed to extricate himself from a serious and lengthy seizure of writer's block by ensconcing himself in an ancient cottage in the 'Vales of Avalon' near Bruton, Somerset, England. He desperately needed the stimulus of being 'right smack in the middle of Arthurian Country' to work on *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1975: 613-617). Just one year prior to this, in 1958, while working on another project, he confessed in a letter to his agent and friend, Elizabeth Otis, his fear of having lost his ability to write creatively:

Why this terror of being through, since everyone will inevitably be one day? It is a race against remaining time, and if so, is it well to race in an inferior machine? Is it an unadmitted passion for immortality? If so, an inferior vehicle is not the answer. Or is it the fumbling motions of a conditioned animal, the dunghill beetle, robbed of his egg which ploddingly pushes a ball of fluff about simply because that is what dunghill beetles do (1975: 610).

At the time he had been working on a contemporary version of *Don Quixote* (the inferior vehicle referred to above) entitled *Don Keehan* which he referred to as a 'modern Western' but which was obviously also related to his work on the Arthurian legend. He had been hoping that this 'diversion' would take him out of his stalemate and allow him to come 'back to Arthur' with a fresh approach. According to Benson, he was particularly struck by similarities between Arthurian legends and those that had evolved out of the American frontier experience as expressed in the following extract from a letter dated 15 March 1958: 'One thing grows out of another while keeping a great part of what it grew out of. The American Western is not a separate thing but a direct descendent of the Arthurian legend with all the genes intact and drawn to the surface by external magnets. Nor was the legend ever new' (Benson, 1984: 838).

This train of thought is conceptualised in another letter dated 26 August 1958:

... The myth seems always to be there 900 B.C., 450 B.C., 1450 A.D., 1958 A.D. The sleeping anlage seems to be brought to life by needs arising from circumstances, usually external ones. Wyatt Earp, King Arthur, Apollo, Quetzalcoatl, St George [and one may add, in hindsight, John Steinbeck!] all seem to me to be the same figure, ready to give aid without intelligence to people distressed when the skeins of their existence get bollixed up. [His 'aid without intelligence' to President Johnson, for example, is referred to later on.]

Surely the so-called adult Western is blood brother to the Arthurian cycle (1984: 838-839).

Steinbeck, probably unwittingly, often indulged in 'diversions' or procrastinative writings in the hope that they would prepare him, after having 'learned to write' to 'not to write anything more – just a history of King Arthur' (1984:844). The reverse was, however, also true. Towards the end of his stay in England, for example, he decided that he could spend his energy more profitably by not wasting precious time in the mechanics of writing but rather by adding to his storehouse of impressions gleaned in Somerset and the surrounding countryside to draw on and apply to his work on Arthur after his return to America. He wrote to Elizabeth Otis on 18 September 1959: 'I feel a sense of rush. A few more side trips to make but just daily to accumulate as much as possible for the winter of my discontent' (1984: 857). The apparently unwitting reference here to the title of what would become his next book, according to Benson, points to the connection between his work on Arthur and *The Winter of Our Discontent*:

They were both part of the same drive, the same effort – one could even go so far as to say that in a sense, *Arthur* acted as a first draft for *The Winter of Our Discontent*. It was a first draft in the same way that 'L'Affaire Lettuceberg' was for *The Grapes of Wrath*, although the two preliminary works in each case were very different from that which followed (1984: 857-858).

My reference to Steinbeck's 'diversions' by no means implies that they were approached in a haphazard fashion or that he did not devote an immense amount of time and energy to these books. His dedicated preparation in tackling *Don Keehan*, for example, is illustrated by the fact that he had re-read *Don Quixote* in Old Spanish in order to familiarise himself with the original language of modern Puerto Ricans in New York. He even considered going to Puerto Rico first and then to trace their migration to the city and the problems of poverty and prejudice that they had found there (1984:

880). *The Winter of Our Discontent* was underpinned by, amongst other things, thorough revisions of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and classical literature, including Plato's dialogues and Marcus Aurelius; documents from American history; collections of American poetry and the short stories of Kafka; the Bible, and Shakespeare (particularly *Richard III* and the sonnets) (1984: 875). In fact, as Steinbeck wrote to Elizabeth Otis on 25 June 1960, 'this whole thing is conceived on the sonnet form. Shake-[sic] not Petrarchian, I mean in tone and sequence' (1984: 879). *The Winter of Our Discontent*, according to Benson, was motivated by

... a process that [Steinbeck] was only partially conscious [of] and that went on without his having any particular goal in mind. Then there was an emotional shock, a stimulus to ideas in response to something he had experienced – the misery of the migrant worker, the infidelity of his ex-wife and loss of his children, or the awareness of dishonesty and greed, both close at home and as a pervasive climate in society at large (1984: 875).

His concern with what he perceived as a malaise in American society led to serious discussions with personages such as President Lyndon Johnson, to whom he was loyal but whom he yet, to an extent, mistrusted (1984: 956), in contrast to Richard Nixon, whom he despised (1984: 877-878). He also, on numerous occasions, discussed such matters with his friend Adlai Stevenson, whom Steinbeck earlier backed in his capacity as Chairman of the Advisory Council to the Stevenson-for-President Committee of New York (1984: 878). Dag Hammarskjöld was also one of Steinbeck's close friends whom he admired and who, according to Benson, had 'embodied for him the spirit of peace and world co-operation that might be achieved through patience and determination' (1984: 971). There are also many examples in *Travels with Charley* of Steinbeck discussing the state of the nation and the tenor of the times with people that he had met during his travels through the USA in 1960. Steinbeck was very much concerned about 'actual human behaviour, that is, what people do to help or hurt other people', and he

never lost his biological perspective, although in some of his later work little explicit reference to that perspective is made' (Benson, 1984: 967). A remark that he made in the last serious essay which he wrote, in *America and Americans* (1966) can be considered as a distillation of his research, including discussions with eminent as well as ordinary people, and which forms one of the central messages of *The Winter of Our Discontent*: 'Perhaps we will have to inspect mankind as a species, not with our usual awe at how wonderful we are but with the cool and neutral attitude we reserve for all things save ourselves' (1984: 967).

According to Benson it is this perspective that tended to reduce political considerations to matters which in the long view were ephemeral and superficial (1984: 967). An element of his non-teleological approach to phenomena in life can also be detected in this view. Although Steinbeck was more than prepared to abandon *Don Keehan*, which he described to his publisher and close friend Pascal Covici in 1958 as 'a hack book and I'm not ready for that yet' (1984:843), he was devastated by the critics' prosaic and even negative reaction to *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1984: 897). He approached this book in a completely fresh style and, in order to avoid outside influences, he isolated himself while in the process of writing from those whose instincts he trusted and who would give well-meant advice which he would previously, probably, have welcomed. Steinbeck was always keen to discuss any work in progress but in the actual writing of *The Winter of Our Discontent* he was secretive, as he genuinely wished to rely on his own innovative resources in identifying, analysing, and expressing the malaise that he perceived in the American soul and which accorded remarkably with his current and very private experience of malaise following various setbacks. These included an episode of serious illness and depression which followed almost immediately upon his return from the peaceful and 'mannered' environment of Somerset, England, to the harsh realities and rudeness of New York, linked to disappointment when he received word of what he considered to be his eldest son Thom's 'latest exploration of dishonesty' (1984: 861). Benson does not elaborate upon

this last issue and describes it as 'largely matters of carelessness that John felt should not be treated casually'. Benson does however concede that Steinbeck's 'pain was not just that of a father, but of a writer, social thinker, and citizen deeply concerned about the welfare of his country, who believed, with some justification, that his sons, Thom and John Jr.'s values were those of a whole generation that was raised by example to believe that success was achieved by 'looking out for number one' (1984: 861).

When the reviews of *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) started to appear, Steinbeck found that even the complimentary ones were bad enough. He wrote to Elizabeth Otis on 26 June 1961:

The reviews of *Winter* have depressed me very much. They always do, even the favourable ones, but this time they have sunk me particularly. Of course I know the book was vulnerable. And I don't know why this time I feel so bad about them. But I do. Of Course I'll climb out of it. Maybe as the future shortens, the optimism decreases. I don't know. I wish I did (1984: 897).

According to Benson, his dejection during this period seemed almost total and was exacerbated by failing health, the press of family concerns, the demands of outside forces over which he had no control and, last but not least, his continuing obsession to complete *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1984: 897). The poor reception of *The Winter of Our Discontent* was the final blow that removed any lingering motivation to do so. Benson wrote:

It seemed so damned hopeless, so damned useless to go on. It wasn't a matter any longer of whether critics liked what he was doing or not, but that they were so locked into their expectations for him that they couldn't even see what he was doing. In the reviews he read, he could find no appreciation of the risks he had taken or any apprehension of the enormous changes he had made in his

approach and the many technical innovations he had attempted. Perhaps he had failed in these things, but he would have liked some perception of them at any rate. Instead, what he wrote was always measured against *The Grapes of Wrath* (or *Of Mice and Men*, *Tortilla Flat*, and *In Dubious Battle*). He was frequently castigated, as in the blast by Kazin, for not growing, yet that was precisely what he had been doing. Apparently the only kind of growth that would be deemed acceptable was if he produced some kind of 'super' *Grapes of Wrath* (1984: 897-898).

One of very few kind reviews [in the *Atlantic Monthly* (undated by Benson)] concluded as follows: 'John Steinbeck was born to write of the sea coast, and he does so with savor and love. His dialogue is full of life, the entrapment of Ethan is ingenious, and the morality in this novel marks Mr Steinbeck's return to the mood and the concern with which he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*' (Benson, 1984: 898).

Benson points out that even this review fails to recognise that Steinbeck has moved beyond where he had been and that he should have been congratulated for employing some interesting techniques to diagnose 'our current moral sickness'. It simply states that this is a good book because it is somewhat like *The Grapes of Wrath*. This pattern was followed by most of the reviews in national magazines and major newspapers, whether positive or negative. A review, as Benson remarks, is not just a communication to a periodical's subscribers but also a message to the author. When all the reviews of this first important publication by a major author in many years are read together, the message to the author is dispiriting even when one considers the possibility that, under pressure of time and space, most reviewers appear not to have read carefully nor considered very fully. The messages that had been conveyed to Steinbeck for some time now, both complimentary and disparaging, 'had maintained an awful sameness no matter what he did or how he changed'. Benson is of the opinion that *The Winter of Our Discontent* was very different from anything that Steinbeck had ever written: 'Perhaps

its experiments, as in *Burning Bright*, were largely failures, but of all the books of that moment, it seemed to put its finger on the malaise of the American soul better than any other' (1984: 898-899).

Although Steinbeck continued his career as writer/ reporter/ essayist for several more years, *The Winter of Our Discontent* marked the end of his career as world-renowned creative artist when it appeared in 1961. *Journal of a Novel*, based on the diary or journal which he kept while writing *East of Eden*; *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*; and his unfinished *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, were published posthumously in 1969, 1975 and 1976 respectively. He continued to live an active and eventful life almost up to the very end (20 December 1968). In 1961 he was invited to join the crew of the Mohole Expedition drilling barge as resident reporter for *Life* magazine and as expedition historian. The object of the expedition was to drill a twelve-thousand-foot hole in the ocean floor off the coast of Mexico and Steinbeck, by all accounts, covered this physically and mentally demanding assignment with distinction as it stimulated his perennial interest in marine and earth sciences. Unfortunately he 'tore a large, well-defined hernia' during this expedition which contributed to his already declining state of health (1984: 893-896). In the same year a film based on his short story 'Flight' was released. In 1962 he wrote a preface to his old teacher Edith Ronald Mirrielees's textbook *Story Writing; Travels with Charley* was published, and he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1963 he toured Europe and the USSR on a United States Cultural Exchange Programme which involved frequent speech-making (which he hated) as well as journalism and the compilation of reports (1984: 925-949). In 1964 he was awarded The United States Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon Johnson. He had already been selected by President John F Kennedy, prior to his untimely death in 1963, to receive this award which is the highest honour presented to civilians in peacetime (1984: 925, 956).

Steinbeck appreciated the honours bestowed upon him but complained that they were making him feel as if he were already dead. Although he initially didn't care much for Kennedy (he backed Adlai Stevenson for President) a steady friendship between the Kennedys and John and Elaine Steinbeck developed after they had been invited to attend the inauguration of John F Kennedy on 20 January 1961. The President's concern for the arts, his literacy and humour contributed to Steinbeck's growing affection for the man. This friendship and support was extended to Jacqueline Kennedy long after her husband's assassination in 1963 (1984: 892, 948, 949-50, 960). His later friendship with President Lyndon Johnson developed to the extent where the Steinbecks were frequently invited to stay over in the White House, but Steinbeck had mixed feelings about being too close to this particular seat of power (1984: 957). The connection between the metaphor of Camelot, which the press had previously attached to the Kennedy White House, and Steinbeck's continuing preoccupation with Arthurian legend was almost inevitable during Kennedy's tenure. Jacqueline Kennedy requested him to write a definitive biography on her late husband but Steinbeck, after initial enthusiasm, declined the honour because, as he confessed to his editor later on, 'I'm worrying because words seem to have lost their value for me. I've wanted to work and the words aren't any good. And they're just the same words that used to be in the dictionaries' (1984: 951). Current problems with his ex-wife and estrangement from his children may have played a role at the time but Benson realistically points out that Steinbeck failed to 'find a form for this theme ... but of course he had been trying for years to do so and the addition of Kennedy to the equation seemed to bring only further complication and emotion to an already complex and emotional task' (1984: 950).

Steinbeck's friendship with President Lyndon Johnson followed a much more complex course, especially on Steinbeck's part. To begin with, he had certain reservations concerning Johnson which included his view of him as 'a too-conservative Democrat who, in the Senate, was a wheeler-dealer with too much willingness to compromise' (Benson, 1985: 957). On the other hand, although they were two of the most prominent

men of their time and had succeeded in very different fields of endeavour, they were very much alike apart from having different personalities and interests. According to Benson, both were rough-hewn men and somehow larger than life. They had both been heavily influenced by F D Roosevelt and New Deal policy and ideals and shared a vision of an America of opportunity for all, without prejudice and without poverty. Both had strong elements of conservative values mixed into their overall liberalism. They were also intensely patriotic, suspicious of the Russians and antagonistic towards communism. As Westerners, both felt uneasy with the Eastern Establishment and were somewhat intimidated by Ivy League types and defensive about their 'provincial' origins. Although they were both highly intelligent and knowledgeable, they were perceived by the media as lacking in intellectual depth. Despite their images as rather simple men, or men of the soil, as they were sometimes pictured to be, they were very sophisticated. Johnson assumed an air of modesty while Steinbeck was genuinely a modest person, but both enjoyed recognition and approval, particularly from groups that they perceived to be antagonistic towards them – the 'Times' literary crowd for Steinbeck, and the old-line liberal establishment for Johnson (1984: 956). In the remaining course of their public careers they shared, to a certain extent, a common ironic fate. Steinbeck gave Johnson his loyalty because he was the President, and his support because of the President's strong domestic programme. Benson reports that, as their relationship continued and Johnson's popular support declined, Steinbeck's loyalty became firmer, almost fierce and, according to Elaine Steinbeck, he developed something like a protective stance toward the President and his difficulties (1984: 956). This reminds one of Steinbeck's (previously-quoted) view of the Arthurian character, in a different context, who is ready to 'give aid without intelligence to people distressed when the skeins of their existence get bollixed up' (1984: 839). According to Benson, Johnson had enormous personal charm and was very skilful in getting what he wanted from people. While he genuinely liked and admired Steinbeck, he also saw in him some political advantage. As a Stevenson supporter (a fact which Steinbeck openly admitted to Johnson), Steinbeck had ties with a wing of the Democratic Party that had been

hostile to Johnson; as a Nobel Prize winner and author whose books were beloved by many, he would be a useful associate; and as an accomplished and experienced speech-writer who shared many (if not all) of the President's values, he could become a valuable resource for a President who needed to communicate effectively with the general public. The Steinbecks were therefore treated almost like members of the President's family and he felt himself being pulled into the President's magnetic field with mixed emotions. On the one hand he had great respect for the office of the Presidency and was vulnerable to the excitement and flattery that came from being around a President, experiencing the history and majesty of the White House on an intimate basis. On the other hand, according to Benson, Steinbeck frequently voiced to friends 'a suspicion of what happened to the writer, scholar, or journalist in our society who became too entangled in the web of power and privilege and its pressures for conformity of opinion and approval' (1984: 957). Steinbeck even warned John Kenneth Galbraith, who was appointed ambassador to India by Kennedy, of these dangers, but as Benson concludes, 'John himself probably became too involved with the Johnson White House and lost some independence of mind as it conflicted with stronger impulses of duty to country and loyalty to friends' (1984: 958).

Steinbeck himself, however, never adopted a political position because it was fashionable, nor did he, according to Benson, ever modify a stand because it had become unpopular: 'Indeed, his instincts tended to drive him in the opposite direction – the more criticism the President received, the more positive and outspoken in his support John became. In the end, support for the war in Vietnam tragically affected the reputations of both men and unfairly tarnished their other accomplishments' (1984: 957). This was particularly unfair to Steinbeck who never, in the true sense of the word, 'supported' the Vietnam war but rather defended the position of the soldiers fighting there, often against their will, and who were increasingly becoming *personae non grata* among their own countrymen. He had immense respect for the bravery of the common soldiers in Vietnam and typically saw in them the qualities of knights of old doing their

duties, whether popular or not. Steinbeck aroused the special ire of the anti-war left as a 'traitor' and he became, for them, a cause *célèbre* to prosecute (1984:1000). Steinbeck, sometimes scathingly, returned their antagonism, unfortunately without reflecting on the consequences of becoming 'a kind of American-conscience figure' as later stated by his son John Jr, in his book entitled *In Touch* (Benson, 1984: 1000). As a somewhat reluctant 'emissary' of the President of the United States (who also happened to be a personal friend) but officially as a columnist for *Newsday*, Steinbeck spent about five months in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, often accompanying troops on perilous sorties and flying in almost all the various types of helicopters in use at the time as an observer on active missions at the age of sixty-four (1984: 1002-1011). He did this because of his genuine concern at what was actually taking place in Vietnam (where his son John Jr. was already in service). He was torn, on the one hand, between a deep sense of loyalty to his country and its President (a loyalty which combined with his sincere reservations about the effect of the communist invasion of South Vietnam), and, on the other, his total abhorrence of all kinds of war. After all, he had been awarded the King Haakon VII Liberty Cross for the role he had played during the Second World War by writing the novel *The Moon is Down* (1942) which greatly boosted Norwegian morale in efforts against German invasion. This medal had previously only been given to heroes of the Norwegian resistance (1984: 586). Converted into a play, *The Moon is Down* was also 'a smash hit' when it opened in Stockholm during March 1943 (1975: 251). As the situation in Vietnam became increasingly complex, Steinbeck's original doubts about American participation in the war returned and his column in *Newsday* tended to deal less with policy and the direction of the war and more with the men he observed and talked to. According to Benson, he knew that 'most did not want to be there, hated the danger and the ambiguity of the situation, but clearly felt an obligation to their country. They were in his mind a gallant crew, and when he left Vietnam, it was his respect for these men that he carried with him (1984: 1001).

Towards the end of his life he disclosed some of his true feelings based on personal experience about the Vietnam war to Elizabeth Otis in a letter dated 31 August 1967: 'We seem to be sinking deeper and deeper into the mire ... I am pretty sure that the people running the war have neither conception nor control of it. And I think that I do have some conception but I can't write it. I know we cannot win this war, nor any war for that matter ...' (1984: 1017).

His convictions about the ultimate futility of war as a phenomenon were already eloquently expressed in his book *Once There Was A War* (1959) which was based on his service as war correspondent in Europe and North Africa during the Second World War. His attitude towards war was, according to Benson, also shaped by the 'Arthurian thrust' of his thought as well as by his 'biological view' that all organisms thrive best in responding to the challenge of some adversity, but humans are able to face adversity 'through resources of the spirit, man's proven capacity for greatness of heart ... for gallantry in defeat – for courage and compassionate love' (1984: 968).

His reaction to the Vietnam war had already come full circle, as revealed in a letter addressed to Jack Valenti as early as July 1965:

I'm afraid bad days are coming. There is no way to make the Vietnamese war decent. There is no way of justifying sending troops to another man's country. And there is no way to do anything but praise the man who defends his own land ... Unless the President makes some overt move toward peace, more and more Americans as well as Europeans are going to blame him for the mess, particularly since the government we are supporting with our men and treasure is about as smelly as you can get (1984: 1018).

When Steinbeck became convinced that his original gut-feeling about Vietnam was correct, he did his best to convey to President Johnson, Vice-president Humphrey and

Secretaries McNamara and Rusk what he thought 'we were doing wrong in Vietnam'. His advice and suggestions were transcribed and immediately despatched to General Westmoreland and his staff in Vietnam. Whether these recommendations, summarised by Benson in *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck: Writer* (1984: 1014-1015) were fully carried out remains unknown, but it is an almost forgone conclusion that Steinbeck played a not insignificant role in changing attitudes in high places and that this, in turn, eventually contributed in some degree to the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam.

Steinbeck's creative writing and other activities continued even during his active involvement in the Vietnam war and despite his failing health. In 1966 he was commissioned by Thomas H Guinzburg, Head of Viking Press, to write an introduction together with a series of essays and captions to accompany an album of photographs taken all over the United States and entitled *America and Americans*. This was a particularly demanding task and one would imagine that his *Travels With Charley* expedition in 1960 assisted him in compiling this publication which was well received when it was published in 1966. In this book Steinbeck attempted to 'take the American apart like a watch' and he found 'some very interesting things emerging' (1975: 807). Benson advises that those who would understand not only Steinbeck's perception of the Vietnam war, but his canon from beginning to end, would do well to read *America and Americans*, particularly the essay on morality, 'Americans and the Future', written during the months of July through October 1965 (1984: 968).

In 1965 he initiated a search for undiscovered or neglected Arthurian manuscripts and with the assistance of Douglas Fairbanks, Steinbeck and another friend and mentor, Professor Eugène Vinaver, an eminent scholar and leading authority on Sir Thomas Malory and the fifteenth century, who held the chair of Romance of the Middle Ages at the University of Manchester, were enabled to search through several private libraries in Britain. After a long search they discovered in the Alnwick Castle library of the Duke of Northumberland what they thought of at the time as 'a completely new manuscript' of

the Arthurian legend. Although it later came to light that the script had already been microfilmed shortly after World War II, the discovery caused great excitement. It appeared to be similar to the Winchester Malory version, but contained an extra forty-eight pages listing names of legendary kings and ended with the death of Arthur, his transport to Avalon and the prophecy of his return. The 'magic' of this discovery was heightened by a second discovery of a little book printed in 1582 which was found in the library of Sir Walter Scott's house at Abbotsford, Scotland. The text was an attempt to prove that Arthur really existed and it quoted, word for word, a passage from the manuscript that they had discovered the day before (1984: 974-975). These discoveries obviously stirred old passions in Steinbeck and the desire to renew his beloved research project on the Arthurian legend and to complete his book at last.

At the request of Harry Guggenheim, he re-visited Israel in 1966, where he was reminded that his German paternal grandparents and other family members lived and worked as missionaries there in the 1850s to convert the Jews to Christianity (1984: 11). The moving history of the Masada siege once again made a deep impression on Steinbeck and he wrote a stirring essay on this topic. He also compared Israel's history to the almost parallel experience of the Americans up to the institution of the labour laws in 1924 (1984: 980-981).

Steinbeck's yearning, however, to return to the 'one book' at which 'all my life has been aimed at', remained with him to the very end. As late as 18 March 1967, when his health was in sharp decline, he wrote to Elizabeth Otis:

And do you know, journalism, even my version of it, gives me the crazy desire to go out to my little house on the point, to sharpen fifty pencils, and put out a yellow pad. Early in the morning to hear what the birds are saying and to pass the time of day with Angel [his 'new' dog] and then to hitch up my chair to my writing board and to set down the words – 'Once upon a time ...' (1975: 860).

I believe that the foregoing material adequately illustrates some of Steinbeck's motives, his approach to writing and the quest for his particular holy grail or, at least, his sometimes stumbling efforts at finding – only to lose again, a path or a symbol or an approach that would lead to the seat of the elusive and inconstant Muse. Prior to his departure for Somerset, England, in 1959, he wrote to Elizabeth Otis: 'What I am going to look for in Somerset I can find right here in New York [but] what I am wishing for is a trigger rather than an explosion' (1975: 611).

However, many critics as well as at least one of his life-long friends, Webster Street, were of the opinion that Steinbeck's Muse resided in California and that when he left, at the end of 1949, 'the people and places he knew ... [he] started to make it up, as in *Burning Bright* (1950), [and] he fell apart' (*Steinbeck: The Man and His Work* 1970: 41). Peter Lisca, in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, also observes that Steinbeck's literary fortunes declined with his move to the East Coast:

Upon the publication of every one of the four books which Steinbeck has published since 1950 [up to 1957 when Lisca wrote this], at least one reviewer has found it necessary to observe that Steinbeck is no longer a writer to be taken seriously, and in reviews of *Sweet Thursday* and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* expression of this sentiment reached the proportions of a massed chorus. The irony is that he seldom *has* been taken seriously insofar as this seriousness demands formal analysis of the works themselves (1958:19).

Although he considered his eleven-month sojourn 'in the Vales of Avalon' during 1959 as one of the happiest times in his life, and in spite of finding that his work was 'going beautifully', he realised towards the end of his stay, as expressed in a letter dated 28 September 1959, that 'it [his work] doesn't march because it doesn't jell: ... If I knew less [about the subject] it would be easier. If I knew more it would be increasingly

difficult. This has been a good time – maybe the best we [his wife Elaine accompanied him] have ever had – not wasted at all. But my subject gets huger and more difficult all the time' (1975: 649).

In a previous letter dated 27 August 1959, this time to Professor Eugène Vinaver, he expressed his despair at failing to 'capture the greatness' [of his material] and to produce the book at which his 'whole life has been aimed at' (1975:859):

This perplexity is like a great ache to me. You see a writer – like a knight – must aim at perfection, and failing, not fall back on the cushion that there is no perfection. He must believe himself capable of perfection even when he fails. And that is probably why it is the loneliest profession in the world and the most lost. I come toward the ending of my life with the same ache for perfection I had as a child. That doesn't change nor does the soul grow callused to pain – it only perceives more channels of suffering – as when Launcelot perceived that his courtly love of Guinevere was not that at all and still could not help himself (1975: 649).

At his return to New York in November 1959 John Steinbeck suffered either a stroke, a heart attack, or both [Elaine Steinbeck reported that she had never been given a diagnosis] and almost died. He wrote as follows to professor Vinaver after the event:

Privately I think my recent illness was largely contributed to by the frustration of not being able to do what I wanted to do with the book ... I reached a state of confusion out of which there was no exit except a dead stop ... Arthur is a terrible master. If you don't give him your best, he wants no part of you ... I haven't been able to reach down into the great water for the timeless fishes. Now and then I see a certain glow like aurora borealis but it shifts and wavers. Sometimes it seems that this is not a matter for effort but for prayer (1975: 656).

However, neither effort nor prayer resulted in the completion of the envisaged magnum opus that was his life-long personal quest and holy grail. Instead, an un-edited, incomplete *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* was published posthumously in 1976. Yet, as early as 1961, he expressed acceptance of the fact that he, like Launcelot, 'was imperfect and so he never got to see the holy grail'. He continued in his letter to John Murphy: '... and finally, it must be that one must accept failure which is the end of every writer's life no matter what stir I may have made. . . I would greatly prefer to die in the middle of a sentence in the middle of a book and so leave it as all life must be – unfinished' (1975: 859).

His wish was completely and ironically fulfilled when the following unfinished letter, which was almost certainly his last, was found long after his death beneath a blotter on his work table in Joyous Garde, the little house at Sag Harbour. It was addressed to his close friend and agent, Elizabeth Otis in 1968:

I have owed you this letter for a very long time – but my fingers have avoided the pencil as though it was an old and poisoned tool ... (1975: 861).



John: portrait,
sitting in chair,
early 1930s.

*(Photo by
Sonya Noskowiak, courtesy
Arthur F Noskowiak,
The John Steinbeck
Collection, Stanford
University Libraries)*

Carol, rarely
photographed, brush-
ing her hair near the
swimming pool at sec-
ond Los Gatos home,
1941.

*(Courtesy Richard
Albee, John Steinbeck
Library, Salinas,
Steinbeck Archives)*



CHAPTER FOUR

TO A GOD UNKNOWN: THE GERM OF THE NOVEL, ITS BACKGROUND, AND A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF PERSONAL AND LITERARY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED ITS DEVELOPMENT

A writer never exists in a vacuum. Whatever private influences are involved, he is also the product of his age and place; however original, even rebellious, his attitude toward his world may be, his mental set is fatefully determined by his social and cultural environment. To understand his book we must also understand the manifold socially-derived attitudes – the morality, the myths, the assumptions, the prejudices – which the writer brought to it.

Richard D. Altick: *The Art of Literary Research* (1981: 5)

In this dissertation, *To a God Unknown* is viewed as a seminal work of fiction, not only because it was, in chronological sequence and its draft form, actually the second novel that Steinbeck had written, but also because it proved to be a harbinger of his works to come. Before examining the final narrative, however, it is necessary to review the draft and to take a very brief look at the two novels and vaguely-related short stories that appeared prior to the actual publication of *To a God Unknown* in order to find an orientation for this somewhat strange novel in the body of Steinbeck's fiction.

Although it only appeared in 1933, a year after the publication of his second novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*, Steinbeck had already completed a pre-publication draft titled 'To an Unknown God' before he even started work on *The Pastures*. Benson refers to this draft, temporarily abandoned by Steinbeck in 1929, as 'a small prediction of his writing career to come' – an aspect that is dealt with in more detail later on in this dissertation (1984: 140). In 1931 Steinbeck tentatively submitted it to his agent in the hope of finding a publisher but soon withdrew it again as he became convinced that it needed to be rewritten before it would be accepted by a publisher (1984: 213).

According to Lisca, *The Pastures of Heaven* which appeared the following year, is perceived by most critics as, strictly speaking, not being a novel because the several stories that it contains are, structurally and aesthetically, too autonomous. On the other hand, the book has more unity than might be expected from a collection of short stories, as Steinbeck indicated in a letter to his agents (Lisca, 1958: 59). However, in 1942 Maxwell Geismar, one of Steinbeck's more scathing critics, surprisingly referred to *The Pastures of Heaven* as 'perhaps [the author's] finest novel' and interpreted it as being concerned with a tragic curse which the later novels seek to define and escape (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957: xvii).

As for the first novel, *Cup of Gold*, which appeared in August 1929 – Benson suggests that after reading *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Cannery Row* (1945), 'the reader may feel that this book does not even seem to have been written by the same person' (1984: 116). Steinbeck himself looked upon his 'firstborn' as a stepchild and although it is, in itself, not a novel without merit, there is in my opinion little reason to rate it much higher than the author did, especially in the context of Steinbeck's canon. In spite of the fact that it sold more copies than his next two books combined, Steinbeck in various letters referred to *Cup of Gold* as a 'monstrosity' or in equally disparaging terms (1984: 160-161). According to Benson, the style is distinctively literary (in contrast to the more modern, colloquial style of Steinbeck's more famous novels) and such a style combined with recurring symbolism and allusion to mythic themes, 'creates a texture that is so ornate as to make the novel dreamlike and abstract' (1984: 115). Recurrent symbolism and mythical allusions also feature in Steinbeck's later works, but in *Cup of Gold* their usage as literary devices is decidedly overdone. In *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation*, Joseph Fontenrose, as a classical scholar and mythologist, points out the use of the myth of the Grail Quest, the Faust legend, the myth of the conquest of Troy, as well as of the dying-and-rising god. He adds to these a further half dozen other themes or motifs from legend and folklore, including material in the novel that relates to

the classical myths of the Argonauts, Odysseus, Orpheus, and Pan; the Druid mysteries; sailor and ghost lore; and the legend of El Dorado. The list is impressive, but Steinbeck found it impossible to develop properly so many suggestions, symbols, and parallels in his novel. Benson sees his effort as being suggestive of a kind of desperation: 'as if Steinbeck had stored up ammunition and was determined to attract the notice of the literary world or bust in one gigantic display of fireworks' (1984: 116).

Cup of Gold is subtitled *A Life of Sir Henry Morgan, Buccaneer, with Occasional References to History*, and thus we are forewarned not to read it as an authentic biography of the real Morgan. Steinbeck's story begins in Wales when Dafydd, returning after his adventures in the Indies, inspires the fifteen-year-old Henry Morgan to go to the Caribbean. Henry leaves home in Cardiff and takes passage as a hand on the ship the *Bristol Girl*, but by the time the ship reaches Barbados, he finds himself an indentured slave, a victim of the system by which the plantations obtained workers. Henry, however, gradually gains power by devious means over his master, James Flowers, a wealthy eccentric with intellectual pretensions. Freed before the termination of his term of indenture, Henry sets out to acquire a ship and joins the buccaneers. Highly successful as a pirate, he soon becomes commander of the whole brotherhood of buccaneers. He hears of a beautiful woman in Panama called La Santa Roja and leads his buccaneers across the isthmus to take possession of her and of the city. But when he sees the woman, whose real name is Ysobel, she fails to measure up to his fantasies and his attempts to possess her are half-hearted and unsuccessful. He plunders Panama, and deserting his drunken band on the beach, he sails for Jamaica and then to England, where he is knighted by Charles II and made lieutenant-governor of Jamaica with authority to suppress piracy. Henry married his cousin, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Edward Morgan, former lieutenant-governor of Jamaica. The story ends with Henry on his deathbed, haunted by the deeds and obsessions of his life.

According to Joseph Fontenrose in *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation*, the story contains, at a rough estimate, about nine parts fiction to one of history:

Henry Morgan may have been indentured; he did become leader of the buccaneers, took Panama, and was appointed lieutenant-governor of Jamaica. The principal episodes have some foundation in fact. Exquemelin, one of Morgan's men, tells about a beautiful and virtuous Spanish woman whom Morgan treated with great respect and wanted to marry, although he already had a wife and she a husband. After steadfastly rejecting his proposals she was finally ransomed, her virtue intact. This woman Steinbeck has transformed into La Santa Roja, robbing her of her virtue in the process by mingling her with 'A Lady in Infra-Red', subject of an unpublished story which he wrote when a student at Stanford (1963: 8).

Fontenrose points out that, on the historical foundation, Steinbeck had built a superstructure of fiction which, on the surface, appears to be a romance of the Spanish Main, a genre which was popular in the twenties. Rafael Sabatini's *Captain Blood* appeared in 1922, and the popular film version of it in about 1925. Steinbeck's Henry Morgan owes several traits to Peter Blood, who also seems to be derived in part from the historical Morgan. Both Blood and Steinbeck's Morgan, forced into indentures, become valuable to their superiors, gain fame as pirate chiefs, and finally become governors of Jamaica. Fontenrose is of the opinion that, simply considered as an adventure story of buccaneering on the Spanish Main, *Cup of Gold* is fully as entertaining as *Captain Blood* and may even stand comparison with Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, which also left its mark upon *Cup of Gold*, as did Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, loved by Steinbeck as a boy. Fontenrose also points out the literary influence of James Branch Cabell (later re-visited in this chapter) on Steinbeck's novel and states that *Cup of Gold* stands in about the same relation to *Captain Blood* as Cabell's novels

to *The Prisoner of Zenda*: 'The youthful Cabell wanted to write romances like Anthony Hope's; Steinbeck, however, did not want to write novels like Sabatini's but like Cabell's, and *Cup of Gold* shows Cabell's influence'. Steinbeck portrays romance in *Cup of Gold* as a perception of events through rose-coloured glasses of myth and legend: myth makes the difference between history or purely realistic narrative on the one hand and romance on the other. But, according to Fontenrose, our perception of this is clouded by Cabell's theme of the vanity of human achievement. The debunking of romance and the romantic hero is confused with the debunking of aspirations. The [obviously Arthurian] character Merlin in the novel said that Henry would become a great man if only he remained a child, and he referred not to childhood's innocent wisdom but to its folly. A false opposition of great man to wise man gets in the way of the contrast between the hero of romance and the real warrior or pirate.

Fontenrose points out a host of themes and character types in *Cup of Gold* that would later re-appear in Steinbeck's fiction. These include unusual similes that illustrate his interest in biology (farmhouses 'huddled like feeding bugs'), but also an allusion to something like the group organism of later novels that makes its appearance in the *Brotherhood of Buccaneers*. Also to be found in *Cup of Gold* are Steinbeck's themes of loneliness, mystic identity with the whole, woman's secret knowledge, the speed of rumour, degeneration caused by too much security, his interest in social justice, Greek and Latin literature, the occult, and the inner life of children. We also meet for the first time recurrent characters such as the Virgin Whore, the prostitute, the competent mother, the religious bigot, the madman, the wealthy amateur scientist, and the wizard-seer. Fontenrose agrees with Steinbeck that *Cup of Gold* is not exactly a great work of art, but he is more generous in his appraisal of the novel as 'a good story' that contains 'some passages of good writing'. He also views it as an auspicious start for an aspiring novelist and is of the opinion that Steinbeck 'learned much about his craft from writing it' (1963: 12-13).

To a God Unknown, on the other hand, was by all accounts very close to the author's heart and therefore requires special attention, particularly in the light of Steinbeck's writing career as a whole. But the novel also warrants careful exploration in view of the fact that, with few exceptions, it has traditionally been given short shrift by critics who either underestimate or fail to recognise its seminal importance and instead choose to condemn it for its faults. The novel was written in fits and starts during the author's formative years, but also over an exceptionally lengthy period of time – given Steinbeck's remarkable proliferation, especially in the thirties. It is therefore also deemed necessary to examine carefully the gestation period of the novel and the 'mental set' of the author in the spirit of the prologue to this chapter in order 'to understand the manifold socially-derived [but also visceral] attitudes – the morality, the myths, the assumptions, the prejudices ... ' which the writer brought to his work (Altick, 1981: 5).

To a God Unknown started off as an idea that Steinbeck took over from a friend, Webster F. Street, also known as Toby, who was a co-member of The English Club at Stanford University during the period 1925-26. The Club, according to Benson, became a kind of base for Steinbeck's social and creative activities at Stanford and its members were composed of students a bit older and more sophisticated than the average undergraduates were at the time. Some were graduates, while others included faculty members and World War 1 veterans such as Toby Street. Steinbeck became a dominant member at the club, partly because he was extremely opinionated as a young man and the gathering 'gave him a forum in which to speak his mind' (1984: 53). Benson describes Street as a 'wild man ... a boisterous companion, heavy drinker, and good story-teller'. He enrolled at Stanford as a 'Federal Student' after losing an eye and two fingers in the war. He had plans of becoming a lawyer and also took several courses in creative writing at the university. During this period Steinbeck and Street became good friends, Steinbeck serving as best man at Toby's wedding in 1925 (1984: 85-86).

Steinbeck's novel developed from an incomplete play that Street had written for one of the writing classes. He eventually gave the manuscript to Steinbeck to complete because he was unable to solve certain problems posed by the plot. Street's unfinished play, in turn, originally emerged from a short story that he had written earlier on called 'Somethin' o' Susie's' which takes place on a ranch in the heavily forested [at that time] Mendocino County in Northern California. The main character, Andy Wane, finds that his favourite daughter, Susie, has grown away from him and his beloved ranch during her three years at college. In order to 'regain' her for himself and the beloved land that he had tried to encourage her to love, he forbids her to return to college. With her mother's support she defies him and, in the end, the father sadly accepts her decision. From this rather mild character sketch of a father at odds with his daughter, Street had been struggling to create what he had outlined as 'a very strange and unconventional three-act play' (Benson, 1984: 108-109). Benson points out that, in the play, Andy's attachment to the land takes on overtones of a bond between a man and a woman – 'a love secretive, perverse, even sexual'. To make matters worse, Andy gets his perverse love of the land mixed up with his strong attachment for his daughter, suggesting that he harbours incestuous feelings for her, which he sublimates as parental concern and protectiveness. Her mother guesses at this secret and encourages the girl to return to her passion for books that talk about things that Andy doesn't understand and about a world that lies beyond the circumscribed limits of his forest. Parallel with this story line, the play deals with the dilemma that Andy faces when he realises that he must sell off part of his beloved forest to the lumber companies in order to finance Susie's education – bringing both the threat of losing his daughter and part of his land together in the plot. The first act of the play ends with Andy's forest threatened with fire while he is still trying to cope with the threat of losing his daughter. According to Benson, 'too many conflicts were leading in too many different directions, and [Street] was disturbed by the theme of incest, which had emerged unplanned' (1984: 108-109).

On taking over the play from Street, Steinbeck's first thought was to write a novel based on his friend's material, listing him as co-author. He went on to do so the following year (1927) and retained Street's original title, 'The Green Lady', for the novel-in-the-making. At the same time, Steinbeck was still busy writing his first novel, *Cup of Gold* and, according to Benson, 'it was almost as if this [new] project attracted him more than the novel he was trying to finish' (1984: 109-110). Several references in letters written at the time as reproduced in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (1975), reveal that he was trying to solve problems posed by 'The Green Lady' in his mind during the fall and winter of 1927-28. According to Benson, Street's play held great fascination for Steinbeck and made a positive impact on his development as a writer:

He had already been involved at length with one lady, the 'Lady in Infra-Red', as a symbol of inspiration, and the yearning, both sexual and idealised, in 'The Green Lady' was similar, although much closer to his pantheistic view of the world. The material of the play also, no doubt, appealed to his impulses toward the grotesque. There were a lot things in this story that would prove shocking to middle-class sensibilities. But despite the weird nature of the play's action, Street's characters – Andy Wane, his wife, and his children – have a genuine rural flavor, and there are many good realistic details in the play. So the importance of this material with respect to Steinbeck's career is not just that it provided the basis for his next novel, but that it brought him for the first time to his primary object: the interaction between members of a farm family in a rural California setting (1984: 110).

'A Lady in Infra-Red' referred to by Benson, was a short story which Steinbeck wrote in 1924 that turned out to become his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, in 1929. Although both the novel and the story that it grew out of could, according to Benson, be roughly categorised as historical romance in that they both deal with derring-do adventures, unrequited love, exotic locales, and historical figures and events (employed with a great

deal of poetic licence), on closer inspection neither really fits into the spirit of this category very well. *Cup of Gold* is a re-telling of the Grail search and, according to Benson, it is too impressionistic and allegorical to be called a historical romance. Benson also points out that 'A Lady in Infra-Red' is only vaguely related to the novel that followed it and that the short story, while making use of the conventions of romance, also makes fun of them. It is, however, significant to note an emerging pattern in Steinbeck's writing technique: novels sometimes tend to develop from vaguely-related short stories. Steinbeck was at this stage experimenting with various short stories and, as reflected in his letters at this time, he was having a great deal of fun doing so. Benson points out that the experimentation was not so much concerned with style and structure (although there is also evidence of these) as it was with the creation of unusual situations peopled with unusual characters: 'This effort would seem to forecast his later success in producing memorable characterisations as viewed within out-of-the-way perspectives – such as Danny and the Pirate as seen within the perspective of the ne'er-do-well paisanos in *Tortilla Flat* or Lennie and George within the perspective of the hopeless lot of bindlestiffs in *Of Mice and Men*'. A second characteristic of Steinbeck's work at the time, according to Benson, is the dichotomy between the romantic and the realistic: 'it appears almost as if these two modes are grappling with each other for supremacy, trying to force the writer to some sort of decision' (1984: 76).

An example of his experimentation with fantasy, is his first professionally-published short story, 'The Gifts of Iban', which appeared in the March 1927 edition of *The Smokers Companion* (subtitled *A National Monthly for Hearth and Home*). Steinbeck was a bit wary about putting his name to the story, partially because of the romantic nature of the narrative but also because of the vehicle that would carry it, and the story appeared under the pseudonym 'John Stern'. According to Benson it is a charming fantasy – a sad love story, lightly treated and set in an enchanted forest peopled by fairies living in ivory houses:

To write such a story for adults and to keep it from becoming cloying and precious requires more skill than one might expect. Steinbeck succeeds partly by force of imaginative detail and partly by maintaining an ironic distance from his material – what fools these fairies be. Unlike the carefree creatures we read about as children, these fairies are consumed (except for Iban) by concern for middle-class human values of status and respectability (1984: 114).

Benson suggests that, judging from the date of publication and the mood of the story, it was probably written in the late spring or summer of 1926 in response to Steinbeck's rejection by a girlfriend, Margaret Gemmel. The themes of the story – the isolation and defeat of the poet by society; the ideal (personified in the beautiful, unobtainable woman) which slips through the fingers of the quester; the destructiveness of material wealth and human pride – are much the same themes as are found in *Cup of Gold* (1984: 114).

Steinbeck extended his 'experimentation' to real life situations in which he also, at times, appeared to be grappling with a dichotomy between the romantic and the realistic. He took up various odd jobs to earn a living, including two very lonely winters spent during 1926 and 1927 as caretaker on a snowbound estate off the south shore of Lake Tahoe on a tract of land that ran up the slopes of Mount Tallac. Here he managed to finish *Cup of Gold* and to continue with his work on 'The Green Lady'. His employers, the Brighams, were very fond of him but thought of him as a 'little crazy' because of his sometimes unconventional and even irresponsible behaviour. Members of the family, for example, when they returned to the estate during summer holidays, would find teacups and glasses that he had left absentmindedly here and there in the woods while writing outdoors. Steinbeck was charming with the Brigham children and he made a special effort to become friendly with one of Mrs. Brigham's granddaughters, Catherine Kemp, who was often made to feel miserable by her teasing brothers and her two male

cousins. He often read to her from books such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, as the character Junius Maltby in *The Pastures of Heaven* would later on do for his son. In later years she remembered him as 'a very interesting, warm man who kept to himself, except for our friendship ... I was attracted to him because I thought he was crazy, and then I thought that I must be crazy too because we were becoming such good friends'. In *Journal of a Novel*, from the perspective of middle age, Steinbeck wrote: 'I can remember this sorrow of not being a part of things from very early in my childhood. Maybe from my very first birthday party', and he obviously felt empathy for children in this predicament. According to Benson, Steinbeck had made friends with books and created a world of mystery and adventure, inhabited with gnomes, fairies and leprechauns: 'One has the feeling that Steinbeck, like his character Tularecito in *The Pastures of Heaven*, thought at times, even as an adult, that if he only dug deep enough, he could discover his own people. Perhaps in certain children he did discover his own people' (1984: 111). However, Steinbeck's lonely sojourn in the mountains certainly created an ideal breeding ground for the mystical thought that eventually found form in *To a God Unknown* and in the 'crazy' behaviour of its protagonist, Joseph Wayne.

He left the Brigham's employment to join a friend as caretaker, or rather 'Piscatorial Obstetrician' (grandly penned on the door of his 'Office'), at the Tahoe City fish hatchery in 1928. He delighted in conducting groups of gullible tourists on solemn tours of the hatchery with a 'learned' running commentary that impressed some of them so much that they addressed him as 'doctor'. Apart from recalling Steinbeck's indulgence in such tomfoolery, Benson also mentions certain incidents of youthful wildness in which Steinbeck seriously confused life with art. This links up with his impulse towards the grotesque and the satisfaction that he seemingly found in shocking middle-class sensibilities, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter (Benson, 1984: 110). Examples include crass behaviour while trying to impress dates, and foolish actions such as drawing a revolver on a drunk who accidentally burnt a hole in the jacket of his 'courting

suit'. The youthful Steinbeck was 'practising at being the artist', and as Benson points out, his idea of the proper role was formed not only by principle as expressed, for example, in his disapproval of George Bernard Shaw's 'public posing and constant search for personal publicity', but by his own peculiar personality (1984: 128). He was genuinely shy, and this was reflected in his continuing problems in his relationships with women. He tended to overcompensate, putting up a front of aggressiveness and confidence that frequently backfired. His romanticism also caused him to try too hard and to expect too much, and the resultant disappointment often led him to alternate gallant behaviour with callousness and crudity. His crudeness would also seem to have been prompted by his revolt against middle-class respectability. His feelings of uncertainty and the loneliness of two years spent in the mountains with very little female companionship, exacerbated the tensions of his emotional muddle (1984: 128-130). It is therefore not strange to find similar tensions in the emotional lives of his characters in *To a God Unknown*. I believe that a hint of Steinbeck's personal shyness at the time can, for example, be found in the awkward way in which Joseph Wayne courts his wife-to-be in the novel (Steinbeck: 1933: 46-47). *To a God Unknown* also contains scenes that may be viewed as indicative of Steinbeck's aforementioned crudity and which probably shocked 'respectable, middle-class sensibilities' in the thirties. One example is the scene in which Joseph Wayne encourages a bull to mount a cow – to the horror of his sanctimonious brother Burton (1933: 33-34).

Certain experiences during this time had a direct bearing upon his inner life of imagination which he could only reveal in his writing and, in rare moments, to his closest friends and to children (Benson, 1984: 132, 138). As related by Benson, some indication of the path of fancy his mind was taking is revealed in a story that he told a friend (Bob Cathcart) that summer. The previous spring, while Steinbeck was helping a worker at another hatchery to strip eggs from the big trout as they came up the creek to spawn, an Indian suddenly appeared at their side. The man asked them whether he could have one of the fish that they had trapped, and when they agreed, he undressed

and went into the icy water to catch the fish with his hands. Something in his solemn manner made them enquire after the reason for his wanting the fish, and the man explained: 'My father is quite sick, and the medicine man at Linden said that if I went to Taylor Creek, got a fish, took it up to Lake Aloha, and gave it to the lady at Lake Aloha, my father would get well'. He then started out for Lake Aloha, a journey of some ten miles by foot into the back country still covered with snow. They saw him a few days later and asked him what had happened at Lake Aloha. He said, 'The lady came out of the lake, I gave her the fish, and she went back into the lake with it. My father will get well now' (1984: 138).

Such phenomena were not uncommon in Steinbeck's life, particularly during his youth. Benson provides another example: during the time of the Los Angeles earthquake of 1933, John was awakened and saw a woman standing in the room where he had been sleeping with his wife Carol. The woman was known to both of them. He gently tried to awaken Carol, but was unable to do so. Later, they saw the woman in Sausalito, and without a word from Steinbeck, she asked, 'Did I get through to you?' The explanation that they settled on was that the vibrations caused by the earthquake must have made some kind of astral projection possible. Benson points out that these phenomena seem to pose an odd contradiction in a person attached in so many ways to science and scientific thought:

Still, such reports do remind us that above all Steinbeck was a poet. He loved strange occurrences enough, perhaps, to will himself in some way to experience them. Obviously, some of his ghosts and visitations were just talk, an inheritance from his mother, talk that he indulged himself in as he had earlier talked about his leprechauns. Others may have been actual hallucinations, produced by combinations of hunger, fatigue, and alcohol. But not much stimulus is necessary for an imaginative man who half believes that nearly anything is

possible: if he spends his day summoning vivid images to his mind, an image or two may very well come on occasion unbidden (Benson, 1984: 258).

However, the Amerindian lady of nature [no doubt redolent with overtones of the Arthurian Lady of the Lake] featured prominently in Steinbeck's imagination as he struggled to establish the plan for his 'new novel preparing', 'The Green Lady', as he still called it after Street's play. Evidence of such mystic symbolism and the offering of sacrifices to a mystic deity in order to obtain 'healing' abounds in the final version of the novel, *To a God Unknown*. Benson points out that although Steinbeck found it advantageous to work from ideas that fit very nicely into his own strange mixture of the mystical and the biological, he was also at a loss to resolve the many conflicts that the plot had set in motion and that had stumped Toby Street. Transferring the premise of the play to the more detailed novel form was a daunting task, but Steinbeck plunged ahead on the first part of the novel that paralleled the completed section of the play. He still had in mind the conclusion that he had worked out earlier with Toby Street – Andy walks out into the raging forest fire and is engulfed by the flames in a gesture that signifies sacrifice and union with the forces of nature. These elements are also found in the death of the protagonist in *To a God Unknown* (Benson, 1984: 139).

Steinbeck was, nevertheless, not happy with certain aspects of the novel, including the setting. He had never been to Mendocino County, and he eventually changed the locale to the Nacimiento River Valley just west of King City – an area with which he was familiar. This was Steinbeck's first try at being a 'writer of local colour' and in order to write about a man in love with a forest, he had to know the forest at first hand. This was also the beginning of a convention of becoming intimately involved with his subject matter. In the late winter of 1929, he and Toby Street visited the Mendocino area, about a hundred and seventy-five miles north of San Francisco. He also decided to change the time setting of the novel – going back to Andy Wane's father, Joe, and altering the family name so that it becomes 'Wayne'. This was probably done to tone down the too

obvious connotation that the first surname has with the actual waning of the fortunes of the Wayne family in the novel. As in the final version of *To a God Unknown*, the protagonist comes from Vermont, and once he is settled on his ranch, he sends for his relatives in the east. Steinbeck's preoccupation with the idea of trekking from east to west – or 'westering' – is a recurrent theme in his fiction and can also be found in works such as *The Red Pony*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and in *East of Eden*. Near the end of the 107-page segment of Book 1 of 'The Green Lady' which Steinbeck completed, Joe dies and Andy is married in a scene that is strongly reminiscent of the fiesta depicted in the final version of the book. Another major change is the introduction of the drought into his narrative – a central feature in *To a God Unknown*. At the end of book 1, Andy is forced to sell off his father's land and is preparing to move northwards to a wetter climate. Steinbeck, however, remained uncomfortable about the setting of the novel, and gradually dropped the project in favour of a group of short stories that he had been thinking about for several months (Benson, 1984: 139-140). These developed into *The Pastures of Heaven* which appeared in 1932 – a year before *To a God Unknown*.

According to Benson, the (revised) draft which Steinbeck started in the summer of 1928 and abandoned in the winter of 1929, contained so many elements that come into use later in various stories and novels, that it almost foreshadows his writing career to come. Joe Wayne is partly modelled after Steinbeck's own father and is 'the prototype of all the taciturn country men in Steinbeck's work who have a deep feeling for the land and who tend to be overshadowed by their loquacious and assertive wives'. He points out that Beth, Joe's second wife, takes that role and is modelled in part after Steinbeck's mother. She prefigures a wide range of Steinbeck women characters, including the young, unmarried school teacher Molly Morgan in *The Pastures of Heaven* and the matriarchal Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. According to Benson, Joe's third wife in 'The Green Lady', Carry, is an early appearance of 'Bible-reading, secretly sipping' Lizzie Hamilton in *East of Eden*, a caricature vaguely modelled after

Steinbeck's paternal grandmother. And young Andy Wayne has some characteristics in common with Jody in *The Red Pony* (Benson, 1984: 139-140).

Benson contrasts the setting of 'The Green Lady' with the somewhat exotic locale of *Cup of Gold* and concludes that while Steinbeck still hoped to achieve some of the greatness he had admired in such giants from the past as Milton, the location of Paradise had changed and its loss brought nearer home:

So concerned was Steinbeck that the setting be close to home, he was unable to complete his manuscript draft when the plan called for the action to move elsewhere. A major aspect of the novels that were to come was not only a knowledge of their location, but a feeling for it. Scene and setting would assume a far heavier burden of meaning in his work than in the fiction of most other novelists. His characters, rather than being imaginative extensions of figures from history and myth, would be patterned after relatives, friends, and the people he had observed while he was growing up. His subjects would be farm families, farm workers, drifters, subcultures within farm communities or small towns; and his themes would turn on conditions endemic to these settings: loneliness, alienation, oppression, and man in harmony with or in conflict with other men and nature (1984: 140).

Steinbeck, at this stage of his life, enjoyed the benefits of a steady, undemanding job at the Tahoe City fish hatchery that gave him ample time to spend on his art – a rare situation in unsteady times. But this was not to last. Largely due to his own foolish actions – among others, wrecking a truck that belonged to the hatchery under very suspicious circumstances – it was decided to terminate his employment. He was in any case thinking of leaving his job in order to find some other employment in San Francisco and to re-establish his relationship with Carol Henning, a girl that he had met when she visited the hatchery. She became his first wife in 1930. His friend at the

hatchery, Lloyd Shebley, was also on the point of leaving to take up an offer with Paramount Pictures in Hollywood, so Steinbeck had no incentive to stay in the area. He was fortunate in securing a job as labourer/warehouseman at the Bemis Bag Company in San Francisco which belonged to his sister Mary's husband, Bill Dekker. Instead of the Bohemian life that he expected to lead in San Francisco, he found himself too tired to write or play after pushing about 'trucks on which are bales of jute which weigh about eighteen hundred pounds' (Benson, 1984: 143). He lived in a real garret with unsheathed rafters and pigeons walking in and out of a small dormer window. San Francisco, beautiful as it was to Steinbeck on a 'Saturday night with five silver dollars clapping their hands in your pocket', was not Paris. Although there were plenty of artists and would-be artists around, there were few suitable places for the artistically-minded to gather in those days of Prohibition and speakeasies, even if he had had the time and energy to do so (Benson, 1984: 146). He tells about it in a letter written to another close friend and kindred spirit, Kate Beswick, during October 1928:

San Francisco is very lovely now. I wish I could see some of it. But I work in a basement and it is nearly dark when I get home ... Am almost convinced that one cannot do eight hours of heavy labor and write too. There isn't enough energy to go around ... Not the desire but the consciousness of an ability to write is slowly dying out of me ... (Benson, 1984: 144).

He decided to quit his job at the end of 1928 and move to his parents' vacation house on 11th Street in Pacific Grove, which his father had decided to let him have rent-free, in addition to a loan of \$25 a month as a kind of advance against future royalties. He was ecstatic, as can be seen in another letter to Kate Beswick written that December: 'I have hardly been able to keep from throwing the bales [of jute sacks] through the roof. I shall write and write ... I think I shall really write a good book one day ... I'm going to dive into 'The Green Lady' ... ' For two months Steinbeck worked almost night and day. He was mostly practising, as revealed in a letter dated 1 March 1929 to his friend Bob

Cathcart of the Lake Tahoe days, who was also an aspiring writer: 'The main thing just now with all of us is to get down as many words as possible and then to destroy the paper. The unfinished and inexpert and naked things which are being published are immoral. They show the workings of the writer too clearly. There was a time when a man did not publish until he could conceal his practising' (1984: 149-150). Benson suggests that he had been honing his style, as evidenced in the manuscript of 'The Green Lady':

His prose had not yet achieved the leanness or clarity so remarkable in such works as *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and Men*, but it was a cleaner, more precise prose, nevertheless, and his lyrical excesses – which had no doubt contributed to the shame he now felt for *Cup of Gold* – had been largely restrained. Despite his earlier cry of despair, in looking back over his first novel, that his disappointment would no longer allow him to 'be drunken with rhythms', a 'saddle and martingale' was precisely what his Pegasus required. The major problem he faced in the development of his style was to harness his impulse toward the poetic, to use it rather than letting it run away with him (1984: 151-152).

Benson also points out that the inability to harness effectively the poetic in the service of prose might be seen as the fundamental problem in the early development of writers as dissimilar in philosophy and technique as James Joyce, D H Lawrence, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway. It is a problem inherent to Steinbeck's age – a characteristic that appears to be most commonly shared by the most distinguished writers of prose fiction in English during the first half of this century. Steinbeck's difficulty in carving out a style of his own to fit the age, seemed to be that he loved the words too much for themselves. He had to find a style that was more organic and functional than the decorative style associated with poetry, as evidenced in *Cup of*

Gold. Steinbeck's insistence on reading his own work out aloud played an important role in the development of the musicality of his style:

His concern with sound had a very wide range, from the accumulative impact of sounds in sections that developed into patterns for the entire work, to the musicality of individual words as they created sequences within sentences. On a large scale, he wanted to create overall musical impressions that would carry out or reinforce the dramatic sequence, setting, or theme. At various times while working on *Cup of Gold*, he would listen to Dvorak's Symphony No. 5, 'From the New World', using it both as inspiration (he felt that the emotional tenor of his novel should be similar to that of the symphony) and as a pattern for structural development (1984: 152-153).

Music and rhythm also played an important part in the final version of his novel, *To a God Unknown*, as they did in many of his other works, such as *Cannery Row*, in which music features as a major metaphor. The title of a novelette on which he was also working during 1930 and 1931, 'Dissonant Symphony', also suggests his interest in musical forms as expressed in prose. Steinbeck's formal musical education included piano lessons which he took, along with his sister Mary, from Edith Brunoni in Salinas during his adolescence. According to Benson, she remembered that while he was willing to learn every classical piece that she gave him, he also wanted a popular piece to learn at the same time. He added to his musical vocabulary and history of music through reading when he was older (Benson, 1984: 153). In 1933 he wrote to the publisher of *To a God Unknown*, Robert Ballou, that it would probably be of assistance to future readers of his novel if they listened to Bach while reading his book (as he did when he wrote it):

The book was hellish hard to write. I had been making notes for it for about five years. It will probably be a hard book to sell. Its characters are not 'home folks'.

They make no more attempt at being sincerely human than the people in the Iliad. Boileau (much like your name) insisted that only gods, kings and heroes were worth writing about. I firmly believe that. The detailed accounts of the lives of clerks don't interest me much, unless, of course, the clerk breaks into heroism. But I have no intention of trying to explain my book. It has to do that for itself. I would be sure of its effect if it could be stipulated that the readers read to an obligato of Bach (Benson, 1984: 258-259).

Sometime before the summer of 1929 Steinbeck abandoned 'The Green Lady' and began a second version of the same story which he called 'To an Unknown God'. In a letter to Kate Beswick he writes: 'The Green Lady' has had a renaissance. I have started over again with a bang and am filled with the old enthusiasm. I think it will be quite a decent book – different from anything I have ever done' (1984: 153).

During the summer Steinbeck worked hard on his new manuscript and often read portions of his writing aloud to a friend from his Stanford days, Carlton Sheffield, whom he called 'Dook'. Benson states that, during the first half of his career, Steinbeck had implicit trust in the opinions of only three people with regard to his work: Dook Sheffield, Carol Henning (who became his first wife), and Ed Ricketts, his best friend and mentor who also had the greatest influence upon his thinking and writing from 1930 up to the time of Ricketts' death in 1948. All three told him exactly what they thought about his work, good or bad (1984: 154). According to Benson, Sheffield was surprised to see what care Steinbeck took in going back over his work to review the phrasing, the rhythm, and the sound of each sentence: 'He would sound out the vowel sounds of a sentence to isolate the effect, making changes where necessary, and then he would review alliteration in the same way. In all of this he seemed anxious to check himself against excess, to make sure that the song in his head that had inspired the flow of his writing had not carried him away' (1984: 154).

According to Benson, one of the problems with his work that Steinbeck became aware of, was the degree to which it was influenced by other writers. His reading ranged far and wide, but he was uncritical in his choice of material, and unfortunately, 'his ear had absorbed sounds and rhythms both good and bad' (1984: 154). As mentioned before in this dissertation, Steinbeck became aware of the deleterious effect that Donn Byrne and James Branch Cabell had on his writing and he determined to avoid conscious imitation of them and especially of their lyrical style. At the end of 1929, while still working on 'To an Unknown God', he wrote as follows to Grove Day, who was a friend from their Stanford period and also an aspiring writer:

I have not the slightest desire to step into Donn Byrne's shoes. I may not have his ability with the vernacular but I have twice his head. I think I have swept all the Cabellyo-Byrneish preciousness out for good. The new book is a straightforward and simple attempt to set down some characters in a situation and nothing else. If there is any beauty in it, it is the beauty of idea. I seem to have outgrown Cabell. The new method is far the more difficult of the two. It reduces a single idea to a single sentence and does not allow one to write a whole chapter with it as Cabell does (Benson, 1984: 154).

Carol Henning also urged Steinbeck to abandon what she scornfully referred to as the 'Irish blarney' that she had detected in *Cup of Gold*. The fact that Steinbeck turned so strongly against this kind of writing was no doubt in part due to her influence, because, as Benson points out, she also had a talent for poking holes in anything pretentious or over-inflated (1984: 155). Steinbeck was, however, still enamoured of sound, in spite of his statement that any beauty that may be apparent in 'To an Unknown God' could be solely attributed to 'a beauty of idea'. In another letter to Day, also in 1929, he expresses disagreement with his friend's 'theory of clean manuscripts' and defends his continuing infatuation with the beauty of the sound of words:

I have no interest in the printed word. I would continue to write if there were no writing and no print. I put my words down for a matter of memory. They are more made to be spoken than to be read. I have the instincts of a minstrel rather than those of a scrivener... When my sounds are all in place I can send them to a stenographer who knows his trade and he can slip the commas about until they sit comfortably and he can spell the words so that school teachers will not raise their eyebrows when they read them. Why should I bother? There are millions of people who are good stenographers but there aren't so many thousands who can make as nice sounds as I can (Benson, 1984: 155).

In the same letter Steinbeck protests that his friend had immediately thought of Ernest Hemingway when he (Steinbeck) had announced his new, more controlled approach to writing: 'I must have misinformed you about my new book. I have never never read Hemingway with the exception of 'The Killers'. I have not lost the love for sound nor for pictures. Only I have tried to throw out the words that do not say anything' (Benson, 1984: 115). Benson remarks that Steinbeck's adamant protest here about the possible influence of Hemingway is interesting because it comes so early. Hemingway was at that stage still *becoming* famous, having just published *A Farewell to Arms* in the fall of 1929, and Steinbeck, without any claim to fame, was in the middle of the process of forging his own style. Steinbeck, in reading Hemingway for the first time in 1929, must have realised that what this author was doing in his prose was very close to what he himself was working toward: '... as if another writer had pre-empted his own future, and that his growth would inevitably lead him into the trap of being thought of as some kind of disciple. The sadness of this realisation at this particular time lay in the fact that he had managed to shed his early models and was just now working hard toward establishing his own voice' (Benson, 1984: 156). According to Benson, Carol recalled that Steinbeck, after reading 'The Killers', told her that Hemingway 'was the finest writer alive' and declared that he would never read him again. He protected himself with this declaration throughout the 1930s but broke his resolution after having securely

established his own reputation with *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939 (1984: 156). As pointed out by Frederick J. Hoffman in his essay, 'Hemingway', which appears in *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, 'Hemingway was at first established as a stylist, on formal grounds, before he became notorious as a public personality'. His early writing was referred to as 'a sort of fundamental language' in which the sentences 'fairly quiver with a packed quality of meaning' and he was said to have brought 'a feeling of positive force through a primitive modern idiom' (Bryer, 1974: 371). Hemingway, like Steinbeck, also felt a kinship for 'the so-called small people, the nobodies, much more than ... the big shots and the pushers' (Bryer, 1974: 399). It was to 'Hemingway the stylist, the man of precise language, with the lean and hungry vocabulary' that Steinbeck felt attracted (1974: 372). However, he soon developed a certain amount of scorn for the Hemingway legend and the man's search for publicity. At their one and only meeting at a dinner party in 1944, Hemingway acted boorishly towards Steinbeck's friend, the author John O'Hara, and for many years after the incident Steinbeck harboured an enormous hostility towards Hemingway the man and his work (Benson, 1984: 547-548).

In contrast to Benson's underplaying of Hemingway's influence on Steinbeck's writing, Peter Lisca is of the opinion that this influence was much more pronounced, especially as reflected in *To a God Unknown*. In *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, which appeared in 1958, Lisca compares a description of an early winter scene as depicted in *Cup of Gold* to another description of the same subject in *To a God Unknown*. He points out the remarkable improvement in prose style, but goes on to compare the 'improved' version to the descriptive opening passage of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and claims that Hemingway is partially responsible for this improvement: 'The two paragraphs are strikingly similar not only in their use of [the word] *and* to impose a balanced, continuous rhythm, but also in their combination of such words as *trees, dust, soldiers, leaves, mountains, down the road, water, and that year*, as well as echoes of

breeze and columns' (Lisca, 1958: 52-53). Lisca's argument is rather convincing, and having read the two passages in question, one cannot help but conclude that Steinbeck had not kept to his resolution to avoid Hemingway after initially reading him ('The Killers') in 1929. This, however, does not detract from Benson's conclusion that Steinbeck's search for a unique style had led him, quite separately, in the same direction that Hemingway had already taken. Steinbeck's uneasy awareness of Hemingway's incipient influence would also explain his 'change from open admiration of Hemingway to a sense of competition with him', even prior to the unpleasant dinner party scene (Benson, 1984: 546). Lisca also points out Steinbeck's early admiration for Thackeray, James Branch Cabell, Donn Byrne, the nineteenth-century Russian novelists, Willa Cather, and others, but is convinced that the opening paragraphs of chapters 2, 14, 17, 18, and 24 of *To a God Unknown* were specifically influenced by Hemingway (1958: 51-52).

Steinbeck, while still living in Pacific Grove, spent many weekends during the summer of 1929 with Dook Sheffield and his wife who had moved to Palo Alto to enable Dook to continue with his masters degree studies at Stanford. The two of them worked over his manuscript of 'The Green Lady' while Carol, who travelled down from San Francisco to join them, was drafted to service on Dook's typewriter. In August that year, the group spent a vacation camping among the redwoods near La Honda in the hills south-west of Palo Alto. Benson paints a poignant picture of Steinbeck the scrivener in very peculiar circumstances:

There he was, in the midst of a grove of trees on a hillside, with his straight pen, pen points, bottle of ink, and ledger, sitting cross-legged at a stump with the dew still wet on the wild grasses around him, writing about a man in love with a forest. He dipped his pen into the ink and then formed the words with the small, neat handwriting more characteristic of a cloistered accountant than a brawny outdoorsman. He wrote with the spirit of a fine cabinetmaker or woodcarver. And

if he walked back into camp, his face beaming and his ledger held on high, it was to celebrate the product of careful craftsmanship that had turned out well (Benson, 1984: 158).

John and Carol got married on 14 January 1930 and the couple settled in a run-down shack on the edge of Eagle Rock which they rented for fifteen dollars a month. In March of that year he wrote to Carl Wilhelmson, another close friend and aspiring writer, that he had decided to change the title of 'The Green Lady' and to revise the plot:

For my title I have taken one of the Vedic Hymns, the name of the hymn – To the Unknown God, as:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

You surely remember the hymn with its refrain at the end of each invocation 'Who is the god to whom we shall offer sacrifice?' Don't you think that is a good title? I am quite enthusiastic about it. Carol is a good influence on my work. I am putting five hours every day on the rewriting of this one and in the evenings I have started another ['Dissonant Symphony']... I guess that the ending of this novel [Andy Wane's self-immolation in the burning forest] was melodramatic but I don't care. The book required such an ending. I am cutting several things out of the new draft namely that stuff about the girl in the university. Completely uncalled for. Also all of that throw back about the childhood of Carrie will be dropped because it's leading off the interest from the main theme. I think it is a better book than I have done though that is not much to say for it (Benson, 1984: 171-172).

What Steinbeck was really doing amounted to the gradual elimination of his original source, Street's play, and the creation of a fiction that was entirely his own. As pointed out by Benson, the real tragedy is that he had been in bondage to another person's

ideas for some five years – ideas that were never clearly developed and with which Steinbeck was never able to establish compatibility (1984: 172).

The story of Andy Wane, who was developed as a psychological case history in Steinbeck's revised draft, became the basis for Joseph Wayne of *To a God Unknown*, who took on the dimensions of a kind of fertility god. From the very beginning, Street's play was in a quandary as to whether the central character was clinically insane or endowed with a rather special religious feeling for the land. Benson states that although this ambiguity persisted to the end, it was apparently a major stumbling block in Steinbeck's own mind and possibly, along with problems posed by the setting, the main factor that kept him from finishing 'The Green Lady'. He felt that he had to give primary emphasis to one pathology or to the other (Benson, 1984: 172). The following passage from a letter addressed to Ted Miller, a friend from the Stanford English Club days who later acted informally as Steinbeck's agent in New York, makes it clear that Steinbeck's first choice was to emphasise insanity:

I'm twenty-eight years old now and I must have at least one book a year from now on if I can manage it. The next one will be short as can be and shouldn't take as long as the last. This one offered too many problems, not only psychological but anthropological, to be done quickly. I had to consult too many psychiatrists and physicians and alienists. I hope the thing doesn't read like a case history in an insane asylum. My father was very funny about it or did I tell you this? He was terribly interested from the first but quite disgusted at the end. After my careful work in filling the book with hidden symptoms of paranoia and showing that the disease had such a hold as to be incurable, my father expected Andy to recover and live happily ever after. I explained to him that with the ailment gone as far as it had, he must either turn suicide or homicidal maniac but that didn't make any difference. The American people demand miracles in their literature (Benson, 1984: 172-173).

According to Benson, Steinbeck's reference to having to 'consult too many psychiatrists and physicians and alienists' is probably an exaggeration, but he did do a great deal of research in both theoretical and clinical psychology, and this would become part of his 'clinical approach' to characterisation throughout his career. Even a character such as Cathy in *East of Eden*, whom some critics thought of as implausible, was carefully drawn so as to have psychological validity. Benson states that since man was viewed as an animal with mental and emotional characteristics, Steinbeck felt it was essential for him as a novelist to have scientific knowledge of those characteristics (1984: 173).

'To an Unknown God' (a change in title from 'To the Unknown God') was sent to Ted Miller in the late spring of 1930 and was almost immediately turned down by McBride. Steinbeck, who was still unhappy about the way that McBride had handled *Cup of Gold*, was not unhappy to see his manuscript go elsewhere, but he did begin to fret when it was sent from pillar to post without finding a publisher. In the meantime, he continued with new work, including an interconnected series of short stories as well as 'Dissonant Symphony', of which there were at least two major drafts. None of the material from this period was, however, published (Benson, 1984: 174).

If one adds the failure of 'To an Unknown God' to find a publisher to the failure of the aforementioned manuscripts and the failure, as Steinbeck saw it, of *Cup of Gold* – one would assume that the picture must have seemed very bleak for Steinbeck. Fortunately, *The Pastures of Heaven* made up for the failure of 'Dissonant Symphony' and even though it sold badly, it was at least published and, in the long run, turned out to be a book to be proud of. Benson states that all the years up to the publication and warm reception of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935 were difficult years artistically, but the years 1930 to 1932 seem to have been particularly difficult and certainly crucial to Steinbeck's development as a writer:

He was in the process of reforming his style, and he was, in a sense a writer struggling to find out what it was he wanted to say – he had no subject of his own, no clearly defined philosophy, only ideas, interests, and attitudes, which, floating here and there on the sea of his enthusiasm, were occasionally given direction by the tide of his will (Benson, 1984: 174-175).

Yet, during the spring and summer of 1930 he felt that, fundamentally, his writing was going well. It was a strange attitude to have since there was almost no concrete evidence at the time to support it, but according to Benson, those around him during the worst years sensed that this was an exceptional man who was in the process of gaining some measure of greatness. During the late summer of 1930 he wrote to Dook Sheffield:

I have uncovered an unbelievable store of energy in myself. The raps of the last couple of years, i.e. the failure of the Cup, and the failure of my other things to make any impression, seem to have no effect on my spirit whatever. For that reason, I have high hopes for myself. Of course, the hundred pages ms. flopped heavily. Just now I am busy on another one. Eventually I shall be so good that I cannot be ignored. These years are disciplinary for me (Benson, 1984: 175).

Although Steinbeck's creativity was at a peak, the young couple's physical circumstances deteriorated rapidly as the Depression set in. After a period of grinding hardship they were forced to move into his parents' second home in Pacific Grove where they were, in effect, guests – a particularly difficult position for Carol (Benson, 1984: 175-177). The young Steinbecks benefited from two factors, as John pointed out in the following excerpts from an article recalling the 1930s that he wrote for *Esquire*:

I didn't have any money to lose, but in common with millions I disliked hunger and cold. I had two assets. My father owned a tiny three-room cottage in Pacific

Grove in California, and he let me have it without rent. That was the first safety. Pacific Grove is on the sea. That was the second ... Given the sea a man must be very stupid to starve. That great reservoir of food is always available. I took a large part of my protein from the ocean. Firewood to keep warm floated on the beach daily, needing only handsaw and axe. A small garden of black topsoil came with the cottage. I never peeled a potato without planting the skins ... In the tide pools of the bay, mussels were available and crabs and abalones and that shiny kelp called sea lettuce (Benson, 1984: 177-178).

Ironically, John and Carol Steinbeck were at their best when they were poor, and their relationship actually deteriorated after the success of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935. Poverty was the occasion for their inventiveness and enthusiasm and, according to Benson, it was Carol's spirit and humour more than anything else that carried them through the hard times while John was still battling with 'To an Unknown God'. She was the one who cut out colourful pictures of crisp strips of bacon from the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post* to serve as garnishing for plain meat loaf, while John, not to be outdone, repaired and repainted a discarded, hollow papier-mâché roast turkey displayed in shop windows around Thanksgiving time, to use as a cover, surrounded with dandelions, for a pile of home-made hamburgers (Benson, 1984: 179-180). Steinbeck, in describing Mary Talbot in *Cannery Row*, was really describing Carol, and Mary's support of her husband Tom (also a writer) was pretty much the same as Carol's for John when times were bad:

She could infect a whole house with gaiety and she used her gift as a weapon against the despondency that lurked always around outside the house waiting to get in at Tom. That was Mary's job as she saw it – to keep despondency away from Tom because everyone knew he was going to be a great success some time. Mostly she was successful in keeping the dark things out of the house but

sometimes they got in at Tom and laid him out. Then he would sit and brood for hours while Mary frantically built up a backfire of gaiety.

One time when it was the first of the month and there were curt notes from the water company and the rent wasn't paid and a manuscript had come back from *Collier's* and the cartoons had come back from *The New Yorker* and pleurisy was hurting Tom pretty badly, he went into the bedroom and lay down on the bed.

Mary came softly in, for the blue-gray color of his gloom had seeped out under the door and through the keyhole. She had a little bouquet of candy tuft in a collar of paper lace.

'Smell', she said and held the bouquet to his nose. He smelled the flowers and said nothing. 'Do you know what day this is?' she asked and thought wildly for something to make it a bright day.

Tom said, 'Why don't we face it for once? We're down. We're going under. What's the good kidding ourselves?'

'No we're not', said Mary. 'We're magic people. We always have been. Remember that ten dollars you found in a book – remember when your cousin sent you five dollars? Nothing can happen to us' (Benson, 1984: 180).

It was also Carol who typed his hand-written manuscripts and who tended to the 'irksome details' such as spelling and punctuation, and who made other minor editorial changes for him. Benson even suggests that it was Carol who, being aware of John's tendency to plough ahead without much concern for the work as an artistic whole, made suggestions that led to the use of the Arthurian backdrop for *Tortilla Flat*. According to

Benson, Steinbeck's most fundamental writing problem was unity, tying various aspects and parts of his work together:

Steinbeck's talent was not intellectual so much as it was perceptual and instinctive. He wrote in bursts of feeling and insight; he had a gift for sensing the implications of relationships and for describing the conditions of people within certain situations and environments. He seems to have had very little sense of plot, particularly over the duration of a novel – possibly because it just wasn't important to him ... He was unable to see situations as having resolutions – to him, life and the difficulties of life were ongoing (as witness for example, the ending of *The Grapes of Wrath*). Therefore most of his novels aren't novels in the traditional sense so much as collections of scenes or sketches (Benson, 1984: 181).

Carol was also aware of John's tendency toward sentimentality and his defensiveness about it. However, it was intimately tied to his talent, and he accepted the fact that he could never escape it or control it entirely. It was part of the force that led him to write in the first place and, as Benson puts it, 'it was the opposite side of the emotional coin from what "Salinas" and "Republicans" meant to him. The two together were the rage and the love that drove him to pen and paper' (1984: 182). Carol did what she could to correct or stem his excesses:

Not very many people could confront this emotional man bluntly. He seemed to overwhelm nearly everyone by his size and by the power which, although usually contained, seemed to leak out from some glowing core at the center of him. Carol was one of the few who could read a piece of his work, look him in the eye, and say, 'God damn it, that's just a bunch of bull shit' (Benson, 1984: 182).

Having briefly dealt with Carol's supportive role and her positive influence on her husband's work during his early years as a writer, it is important to pose the question whether Ed Ricketts, at this stage in Steinbeck's life, had a comparable influence on his writing, and more specifically, on the novel under discussion, *To a God Unknown*. In this context, it is an important consideration because, as Benson puts it, 'of all the people Steinbeck came to know during the course of his life, the one who most influenced his thinking and his writing was Edward F. Ricketts' (1984: 183). Although the last draft of the novel was written during the first years of their friendship, so much research and thought had gone into it beforehand that I believe one can safely assert that, between the time of their first meeting in October 1930 and the publication of the novel in 1933, Ricketts' contribution, if any, was minimal. In a letter to Carl Wilhelmson post-dated 1 October 1930, Steinbeck wrote:

It is so long since I have heard from my novel ['To an Unknown God'] that I have nearly forgotten it. Harper's had it the last I heard. In all probability it must be put away and rewritten in a few years. I think it is worth rewriting. I am slowly working on a new novel [never referred to by name, but possibly 'Dissonant Symphony'] now which is more leisurely than I have ever attempted. The subject is not new or even recent. I rely only on the expression of the theme to give it any value at all. But in it I hope to get deeper under the surface into the black and sluggish depths of people than I ever have before. I want to show not necessarily why people act as they do, but to show the psychological steps which precede and clear the way for an act. There is material for a novel in the fact that a man goes to town to buy a blue necktie. My novel is by no means that delicate but it does move around among the tender searching roots of human beings. I think as I get older, things grow far more complicated ... (Benson, 1984: 202-203).

Although Benson is of the opinion that *Cup of Gold* and 'To an Unknown God' depended heavily on written sources – myth, history, and other literature – he also

states that 'Steinbeck's attraction to a scientific approach or basis for his work precedes the years of his closest association with Ed Ricketts' (1984: 203). He supports this view by quoting from the aforementioned letter to Wilhelmson and states that Steinbeck appears to be referring to a process very similar to Ed's concept of 'is' thinking, or non-teleological thinking, when he writes: 'I want to show not necessarily why people act as they do, but to show the psychological steps that precede and clear the way for an act' (1984: 204). Although this passage refers to an unknown manuscript (presumed to be 'Dissonant Symphony') that Steinbeck was working on at the time, it clearly shows that he was already convinced that one should not ask 'why' or look for causes, but instead look to see *what* things are and *how* they work. The letter also indicates that in his experimentation, his struggle to find new forms, he had encountered a conflict between his attempt to enter the subjective area of human experience and his devotion to observation as the basis for truth. Benson elaborates:

When we go beyond the point where we can actually observe, not only is there a high probability of being wrong, but we are actually involved in a form of dishonesty. In his letter he [Steinbeck] continues: 'I know the modern escape is "To be wrong is nothing. To be unconvincing is the one crime". I cannot bring myself to this opinion. Somewhere in the creative mind there is a passionate desire for truth which has absolutely nothing to do with religion or ethics. The man who will distort the truth may be an artist who distorts for a given compositional purpose, but a liar turns out invariably to be a charlatan'. That is, to project something you don't know to be the case was to him a form of professional quackery. Thus it is understandable, with such doubts underway, that only a short time later he destroyed a large section of his novel as 'unrelieved rot' (1984: 204).

Benson concludes that the result of all this experimentation was that, 'in the battle between the subjective and the objective, the subjective lost – it didn't fit either his

philosophy or his talents. From this point on, he thought of himself as “an objective writer” (1984: 204). Although there is no direct advocacy of science evident in this attitude, there is according to Benson, an exposure of the futility of the non-scientific, a criticism of closed, man-centred philosophies, an attack, generally, on the blindness and self-deception of religion (1984: 239).

Steinbeck's conception of the cosmos as an organic whole – as depicted in *To a God Unknown* – also brings forward his thinking prior to his acquaintance with Ed Ricketts. All of nature is interconnected in the novel – plants, animals, the earth, sky, and the cycles of weather and of life. This, often, also formed the basis for his 'mythological' approach to writing as well as the focus for his 'religion'. For example, the real 'hero' of *To a God Unknown* is nature, according to Benson, and man's attempts to control, influence, or understand this organic whole deductively, is doomed to failure (1984: 239). Joseph Wayne is 'nature's priest' or 'shaman' in the novel, but he also reminds one of the Arthurian figure that sets out on a kind of grail quest in order to find the secret ingredient, catalyst or 'acceptable sacrifice' that will induce nature to end the devastating drought. Benson states that, apart from Steinbeck's organismic view of nature as an holistic entity, his attachment to nature, his scientific outlook on life, his inductive approach to experience, and his adherence to non-teleological thinking, were all well-established patterns in his thought long before he met Ricketts (1984: 241). I believe that a certain parallel may be drawn with regard to Steinbeck's early fascination with Ernest Hemingway as a writer whose style happened, at the time, to overlap somewhat with the direction in which his own form of expression was developing, and his 'discovery' of Ed Ricketts as a kindred spirit. While whatever admiration Steinbeck may have had for Hemingway as a person soon disappeared, he continued to respect him as a master of the short story genre. His feeling of kinship with Ricketts, on the other hand, developed into a mutually enriching friendship that inspired both men to greater achievements. Although Ricketts collaborated with the biologist Jack Calvin in writing *Between Pacific Tides* which appeared in 1939, Benson reports that Steinbeck

'was deeply involved in the biologist's hopes for the book and suffered with him through the difficulties of preparing it, getting a publisher and seeing the book through press' (1984: 396). Benson also states that Ricketts was not a writer, and it was undoubtedly Steinbeck who inspired their collaboration on *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*. By 1947 plans were well underway for the third part of their joint-project that was envisaged as a work on the fauna of the Charlotte Islands and would have been the final part in a trilogy of manuals about the life of the Pacific shores, to be titled *The Outer Shores*. Unfortunately, Ed's death in 1948 put paid to their plans to complete this valuable set of scientific manuals that would have been interlocked by cross references and which they planned to keep updated (Astro, R. and T. Hayashi, 1970: 115).

Ricketts respected Steinbeck's views on biological matters, among others, as witnessed by the following lines written by Ed 'in a tantalising scrap of paper' which Joel W. Hedgepeth, a biologist and close friend of Ricketts, found among his documents after his death and quoted in his paper entitled 'Philosophy on Cannery Row' which appeared in *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work* :

I have been especially interested in John Steinbeck's notions because they developed widely the holistic concepts being felt specifically in modern biology. The zoologist Allee must be interested in these enlarged horizons which might very easily (altho I happen to know they couldn't) have sprung from the germ of his animal aggregation concept. [Allee wrote a book on the subject.] Many workers in the vanguard of science and the arts achieve independently expression of the same underlying concept (Astro, R. and T. Hayashi, 1970: 96).

The following excerpt from a letter by Ricketts to Hedgepeth, dated 18 November 1941, also illustrates the extent to which Steinbeck and Ricketts collaborated in the compilation of the journal of the voyage which the two of them undertook to the Gulf of

California during the months of March-April 1940. The excerpt refers to the aforementioned *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*, which was published in December of 1941:

However much it seems otherwise, 'Sea of Cortez' is truly a compilation. Jon worked at the collecting and sorting of animals, and looked over some of the literature, including the specialist literature, and I had a hand even in the narrative, altho the planning and architecture of the first part of course is entirely his, as the planning of the scientific section is entirely mine (Astro, R. and T. Hayashi, 1970: 111).

Hedgepeth also quotes from a letter dated 3 May 1970 which he received from Ricketts' sister, Frances, illustrating Ed's firm belief in his friend's talent which he, no doubt, nurtured: 'Ed would be troubled with John when he let ... not best writing be published because he felt that his best writing was so fine. This is the only way that I ever saw Ed being possessive with John. Ed was sure – long before it was awarded that John would receive the Nobel' (Astro, R. and T. Hayashi, 1970: 117).

Steinbeck's deep regard for Ed Ricketts is well-documented. The following excerpt from 'About Ed Ricketts', a biographical essay which he added to a separate publication of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, should suffice to illustrate a measure of the loss that he felt at his friend's death:

We worked and thought together very closely for a number of years so that I grew to depend on his knowledge and on his patience in research ... Knowing Ed Ricketts was instant. After the first moment I knew him, and for the next eighteen years I knew him better than I knew anyone, and perhaps I did not know him at all. Maybe it was that way with all his friends. He was different from anyone and yet so like that everyone found himself in Ed, and that may be one of the

reasons his death had such an impact. It wasn't Ed who had died but a large and important part of oneself (Steinbeck, E. and R. Wallsten, 1975: 315-316).

In tracing and documenting influences on Steinbeck the man and his art, one of the problems that I encountered and which is also mentioned by Benson (1984: 231) is the difficulty of separating those ideas that Steinbeck may have had prior to his meeting with Ricketts from those that he acquired afterwards. Another is the problem of separating Ed's influence from many others that Steinbeck was subject to during the same period. It is hoped that, for the purpose of this dissertation, Ed's part in Steinbeck's development in general has been adequately dealt with and that the minimal influence, if any, that he had on the writing of *To a God Unknown* has been clearly established. This is important in the light of the fact that critics have too often been reluctant to think of Steinbeck as an intellectual in his own right, and because his original thought has too often been attributed to Ricketts' influence. Benson notes that imperceptive readers are inclined to think of Steinbeck as a large, good-hearted man, perhaps a bit gruff at times – a man of the people, who writes either humorous accounts of simple folk or journalistic reports of the struggles of working people: 'We like his heart, we admire his eye, but we are a bit suspicious of his mind' (1984: 231). He furthermore points out that among those who have judged Steinbeck, there are individuals who have wrongly assumed that he wanted to join them in being considered an intellectual, but just couldn't manage it – the fraternity assumption:

On the contrary, he had no desire to apply – by writing criticism or philosophical essays, or by appearing at universities – and refused to wear any badges or carry any banners that might lead people to believe that he aspired to or assumed such an identity. Indeed, he bent over backward to make sure that no one would ever make such an association ... While he was scholarly, he refused to look scholarly; while he frequently talked about intellectual concerns, he hated to talk about such things under circumstances that made the discussion self-

consciously 'intellectual' ... While he took himself extremely seriously much of the time, he couldn't, as a rule, stand other people who [publicly] took themselves so ... He thought of intellectuals as destructive of creativity and saw their dress, speech, snobbery, and search for status as the quintessence of the very things he hated most in society. For him, the tweedy intellectual and the pot-bellied, hypocritical businessman were fraternal twins. His vision of his role was writer as artist. As artist he had a reluctance to deal with ideas directly and publicly (1984: 232).

Returning to influences on Steinbeck's writing at the time, Benson notes that *To a God Unknown* was developed during a time of great ferment for all the arts, but particularly for literature. Forms, perspectives and techniques evolved, interacted, and changed with an energy and rapidity that made the new direction in the arts very hard to follow:

It was as if a great wind carried a host of yeasty spores across Western culture – French post-impressionism and symbolism, Einsteinian relativity, Freudian subjectivism, and a dozen other 'isms' – which settled here and there and combined in one permutation after another. Spreading from art form to art form, genre to genre, and artist to artist, the very air seemed heavy with budding possibility. A strain might be identified and labelled, but by then new species had developed, new patterns and combinations had formed, multiplied, and passed on (1984: 200-201).

The art of fiction writing became less concerned with the telling of stories and more with the inspired vehicles by which the writer could induce the reader to perceive reality from a new vantage point. Benson is of the opinion that Steinbeck was not directly infected by this new spirit because he was strongly motivated toward independence and remained isolated from other writers and the main centres of artistic activity.

Since he read widely, he may have been prompted toward experimentation by the fiction of others that he is known to have read. Benson mentions John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) as well as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Apparently Steinbeck also planned, like Dos Passos, to use materials from diaries, newspapers, and other written documents to enlarge his perspective and to 'give further weight to the contrasts between the public and private man, his outside and inside dimensions' (Benson, 1984: 202). His previously mentioned embarrassment in being overly influenced by earlier models such as Byrne and Cabell, however, made him cautious about falling into the same trap. Benson claims that, for the rest of his life, he was more likely to read classics than recent fiction:

The most probable sources of a stimulus toward a more subjective approach in his writing, therefore, came from poetry – Whitman, Yeats, and Jeffers – and from his extensive reading in philosophy and psychology (1984: 201).

According to Benson, it was Jung, rather than Freud, who captured Steinbeck's interest. Aspects of Jungian theory, particularly the collective unconscious, found fertile ground in Steinbeck's preoccupation with myth and evolutionary biology, but it is clear from his portrayal of Andy in 'To an Unknown God' that he had also been reading abnormal psychology. This aspect, once again, emphasises his concern for 'truthful' portrayal as witnessed by the pains that he took to make Andy's case in 'To an Unknown God' as clinically accurate as possible. Benson, however, also points out a strange anomaly in the fact that, in contrast to the accurate portrayal to be found in 'To an Unknown God', a feeling of near-fantasy is evident in *To a God Unknown*, and poetic licence is used freely in *Tortilla Flat*. The apparent dichotomy that becomes evident when one subsumes both realism and fantasy under the rubric of 'truth' – which Steinbeck was extraordinarily devoted to – is clarified by Benson's view that, in the twenties, concern for the nature of reality and the ways in which we perceive reality, became more than ever the province of the writer as well as the philosopher, and that Steinbeck was

descended, in vision and intent, from the Greeks, rather than American transcendentalism or American realism-naturalism (1984: 201, 261). According to Benson, Steinbeck thought in terms of the *Iliad*, not in terms of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* or Norris' *The Octopus*: 'If he had labelled himself at this point in his career, he probably would have called himself a "symbolist."' This ties up with Warren French's view of Steinbeck as an 'allegorist', as previously pointed out. Steinbeck, in a letter to Carl Wilhelmson written on 9 August 1933, said: 'I don't think that you will like my late work. It leaves realism farther and farther behind. I never had much ability for nor faith in realism. It is just a form of fantasy as nearly as I could figure' (Benson, 1984: 261).

While 'To an Unknown God' was simmering on the backburner, as it were, Steinbeck was writing *The Pastures of Heaven*, his series of inter-linked short stories in the style of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. His research for this book stimulated his interest in family history, and particularly father-son relationships and primogeniture – an important theme in his novel. This led him to a renewed study of the Bible and particularly to passages in the Old Testament describing the relationships between the generations, such as the story of Jacob and Isaac which would feature so prominently in his re-writing of 'To an Unknown God' (Benson, 1984: 209-210).

A turning point in the fortunes of 'To an Unknown God' (and in Steinbeck's writing career) came in 1930 when Steinbeck heard, perhaps from Carl Wilhelmson, of two women – Mavis McIntosh and Elizabeth Otis – who had set up a new publishing agency in New York. Steinbeck retrieved his manuscript from his friend Ted Miller, who had no success in finding a publisher, and submitted it, together with 'Murder at Full Moon' (a pulp mystery-detective story that he had apparently written in nine days in a desperate effort to earn some money to keep the wolf from the door) to McIntosh and Otis. Fortunately, his new agents had the good sense not to seek a publisher for 'Murder at Full Moon' (which was written under the pseudonym Peter Pym) although there was a ready market for such stories. Incidentally, the murder in the aforementioned story was

triggered by the affects of the moon on a psychotic mind, in much the same way that Andy in 'To an Unknown God' was affected by the moon. Both stories have a Jungian flavour and in both cases the protagonists suffered from schizophrenia (Benson, 1984: 206-207). He later on sent his agents some more of his 'grand old unpublishables' which they, indeed, found impossible to sell. Elizabeth Otis, who became a life-long friend and mentor of Steinbeck's, remembers that it was his unique style that made the deepest impression on her: 'Those sentences that in everything he did had their own distinctive rhythm'. For nearly forty years (as well as after his death) the agency of McIntosh and Otis represented him, acting through the years as much more than an agent. They did much of the editing that might be needed prior to publication, so that every manuscript was nearly ready to go to the printer when submitted. Elizabeth Otis also did a great deal of research work for Steinbeck, and when he became famous, the firm protected his deep need for privacy, blocking reporters and others who requested his time, screening his letters, and answering much of his mail. Elizabeth, in particular, became his sounding board, tactful counsellor in literary matters, and sometimes also in personal matters (Benson, 1984: 213-217).

Initially, Elizabeth was optimistic about 'To an Unknown God' and even suggested that, following its publication as a novel, Steinbeck should try, with a collaborator if necessary, to make it into the play that it had started off as being. Steinbeck, however, was skeptical of her 'boundless enthusiasm' (Benson, 1984: 217). During this period the Steinbecks joined the Sheffields in another camping holiday among the redwoods at La Honda and once again Steinbeck was inspired to look at his novel with renewed interest. In a letter to Carl Wilhelmson dated 1 September 1931, he wrote about this and, at the same time, revealed his own, almost shocking, isolation from the realities of the world around him :

I re-read the Unknown God (sic) and was horrified at its badness. However I think I can make it pretty decent by working on it by cutting, but these Corral

stories [*The Pastures of Heaven*] must be finished first ... The world seems to be crumbling. It's about time. The old values were worn pretty thin. We may yet see Methodists dying on barricades in our cities. People are making communist speeches to enthusiastic audiences here in Pacific Grove. Can you imagine that? And in the churches too. I really must take a paper. The times are too interesting to avoid (Benson, 1984: 217).

Benson states that despite the fact that the country had plunged into the depths of a terrible depression, one has the feeling in reading his letters, that he was having his own private depression and that he really wouldn't be that much better off, in money or morale, until he made some progress in his own artistic struggle: 'It is strange at this point to think ahead and realise that in a few years he would be so thoroughly drawn into the times that afterward his work would be used to typify the decade' (1984: 218).

On his thirtieth birthday Steinbeck received a telegram informing him that the publishers Cape and Smith had accepted his manuscript (*The Pastures of Heaven*) within three days of its submission to them. He expressed his pleasure at the news in a letter written in March 1932 to his friend George Albee: 'I am very glad, more for my folks' sake than for my own. They love it so much. Dad's shoulders are straighter for it and mother beams. I am no longer a white elephant, you see' (Benson, 1984: 220). Benson, however, states that, in a sense *Pastures* was only a recess from his major project: 'To an Unknown God'.

His mind and emotions had been steeped in the material for a long time, and the mythology (primarily from [Frazer's] *The Golden Bough*), psychology, and segments from the Old Testament that he had been reading over the past several years had been percolating in his head like a witches' brew. It had thrown a spell over him much like, and probably connected with, his fascination with the *Morte d'Arthur* (1984: 220).

In the late fall of 1930, after he had already sent off the manuscript of 'To an Unknown God' to McIntosh and Otis, he wrote a rather curious letter to Carl Wilhelmson which gives some indication of how the material of the manuscript continued to work on his imagination. The following are some excerpts:

Yesterday I went out in a fishing boat – out in the ocean. By looking over the side into the blue water, I could quite easily see the shell of the turtle who supports the world ... Our brains are rooted in some black mysterious murk like the great depths which occur in the sea ... I for one and you to some extent have a great many of the basic impulses of an African witch doctor. You know the big pine tree beside this house? I planted it when it and I were very little. I've watched it grow. It has always been known as John's tree. Years ago, in mental playfulness I used to think of it as my brother and then later, still playfully I thought of it as something rather closer, a kind of repository of my destiny. This was all amusing fancy, mind you. Now the lower limbs should be cut off because they endanger the house. I must cut them soon and I have a very powerful reluctance to do it, such a reluctance as I would have toward cutting live flesh. Furthermore, if the tree should die, I am pretty sure I should be ill. This feeling I have planted in myself and quite deliberately I guess, but it is none the less [strong] for all that (Benson, 1984: 220).

In the light of the fact that the relationship described here was to become a major feature of his novel (in *To a God Unknown* an oak tree serves as repository for the protagonist's father), one might conclude that he was re-writing the novel in his head while he was still working on *The Pastures of Heaven*, and that he was 'also very deliberately thinking about how he would restructure it. 'Restructure' is the operative word here, as is evident from a letter written in the fall of 1931 to George Albee:

If the *God Unknown* were well done it might be submitted [to another agent as suggested by his friend], but it is torn down like a Duzenberg having its valves ground. And it won't be rebuilt for nearly a year and a half. I thought I could finish the *Pastures of Heaven* by Christmas and I could too if the damned things wouldn't get in each other's way. Then I'll start rebuilding the *Unknown God*. It will be good to have a single entity to work on again. I don't think I like to write shorts very much. Still it was a change (Benson, 1984: 221).

At this point it may be of interest to note that Steinbeck was proud of his knowledge about old, used cars and thought himself a good backyard mechanic. He needed to be, since his choice of transportation was more often than not limited by his lack of money, although, in 1929 he almost bankrupted himself by buying a very rare custom-made Marmon, purportedly driven by Barney Oldfield. He spent days canvassing the junkyards of Los Angeles County for a serviceable ring gear and some two weeks in repairing his high-class five-passenger touring car which soon broke down again. When he writes about broken down rustbuckets undergoing improvised roadside repairs, as in *The Grapes of Wrath*, it is from bitter experience. His love for things mechanical, for gadgets and for inventions, also reflects his admiration and respect for creative people in the broadest sense, as witnessed in so many of his novels, including the bus driver Juan Chicoy in *The Wayward Bus*, and Samuel Hamilton in *East of Eden*. Even the crucifix and altar used by the itinerant priest in *To a God Unknown* are marvels of invention: they can be dismantled for easy transportation and then be screwed together again! Benson states that Steinbeck's knowledge and experience of mundane, mechanical things, largely ignored by those who have viewed him only in literary terms, has been part of the conduit of sympathy that he has established with his readers: 'He gives a great deal of attention to small things which have meaning for ordinary people, and it was such small things that provided much of the foundation for the success of a novel such as *The Grapes of Wrath*' (Benson, 1984: 166).

In the latter half of 1931 Steinbeck told George Albee that he intended to change the title of his novel and, reverting to mechanical terms again, that the story would have to be 'cut in eight pieces, refitted and changed' (Benson, 1984: 221). By the time that he had turned his full attention to re-writing the novel in January 1932, he had decided that patchwork wouldn't do. He wrote to Mavis McIntosh that he intended to 'cut [the story] in two at the break and work only at the first half, reserving the last half for some future novel'. With the material of the first half of the manuscript, he would construct a new story. Three weeks later he mentioned in a letter to Miller that he had changed 'the place, characters, time, theme, and thesis and name' (Benson, 1984: 221).

By eliminating the insane character Andy in the forest at Mendocino in the second half of the story, he had virtually wiped away the last vestiges of Toby Street's play, and his reconstruction of the first part was so complete that the new version would have to be considered to be an entirely new novel. The rather dreary rancher Joseph Wayne, according to Benson, is transformed into a central character of larger-than-life dimensions, part Old Testament patriarch, prophet, and priest, and part demigod from the vegetation myths. A new supporting cast of characters enters the drama, many of whom resemble Steinbeck's friends, acquaintances, and relatives. Each character now depicts, in some or other way, an aspect of man's relationship with the mysteries of nature. The setting of the novel is also transferred to areas familiar to Steinbeck: the Jolon countryside, the Nacimiento River Valley to the west, and the adjacent coast below Big Sur. The central plot device becomes the drought – a hook upon which Steinbeck can hang all his thoughts about man's relations with nature (Benson, 1984: 222).

In a letter to Mavis McIntosh of 25 January 1932, he reminds her about his more subtle use of the drought as a device in the previous manuscript in which the moon was the actual trigger that was used to set off nervous responses in, especially, his insane character Andy Wayne. The drought would now be used as a cause for curious nervous

diseases which would be relieved by the rain. He describes his own experience of a recent drought which was broken by unexpected floods, and which influenced the change that he had made:

Do you remember the drought in Jolon that came every thirty-five years? We have been going through one identical with the one of 1880 ... This dryness has peculiar effects. Diseases increase, people are subject to colds, to fevers and to curious nervous disorders. Crimes of violence increase. The whole people are touchy and nervous. I am writing at length to try to show you the thing that has just happened. This winter started as usual – no rain. Then in December the thing broke. There were two weeks of downpour. The rivers overflowed and took away houses and cattle and land. I've seen decorous people dancing in the mud. They have laughed with a kind of crazy joy when their land was washing away. The disease is gone and the first delirium has settled to a steady jubilation. There will be no ten people a week taken to asylums from this county as there were last year. Anyway, there is the background. The new novel will be closely knit and I can use much of the material from the Unknown God, but the result will be no rewritten version (Benson, 1984: 222).

Another important element which Steinbeck brought to the final version of his manuscript was a sub-plot concerning inheritance, or the passing on of property or authority from one generation to another. Originally inspired by his studies of the Bible, this theme was, according to Benson, first used in the unnamed manuscript that Steinbeck was working on in 1930. The theme is also used in an adapted form in *The Pastures of Heaven* and is tied to the themes of the Garden of Eden, and of Westering (the movement to California) – a combination that would occur several times in his fiction, most notably in *East of Eden* (Benson, 1984: 222-223).

Steinbeck wrote to George Albee that the first month of his writing of *To a God Unknown* (the final version of the title that he had decided upon) went 'rapidly and well' – another indication that a good portion of the novel had already been written in his mind. Actually the entire novel took a little over a year to write and, apart from the usual number of problems and delays, the writing went rather smoothly considering that this was probably his most complex work of fiction to date (Benson, 1984: 223).

While Steinbeck was writing his novel based largely on myth and Jungian psychology, a rather serendipitous coincidence occurred: Joseph Campbell, who was at the time becoming the foremost authority on mythology, moved in next door to Ed Ricketts' house (not the laboratory). Campbell, who had spent his youth wrapped up in reading and research, had decided to see something of the world and ended up broke and without any resources in Monterey. He was assisted by the Red Cross and the Salvation Army who played an important role in sustaining destitute people during the dark days of the Depression, and Ed's neighbour was one of those who provided accommodation in return for gardening and other odd jobs. Steinbeck lost no time in discovering who Campbell was and Campbell remembers Steinbeck reading the first page of *To a God Unknown* to him shortly after he arrived. Carol recalls Campbell as an extraordinary man, extremely well-educated, who could talk about almost any subject. He became a frequent visitor at the lab and at the 11th Street house, and according to Carol, her husband picked up quite a good bit of useful material from him (Benson, 1984: 223).

Benson, however, states that although Campbell was the mythologist, he felt that he may have learnt more from Steinbeck about the relevance of myth than vice versa. Later, in reading Steinbeck's fiction, he had the impression that some of the mythic images portrayed may have emerged from their discussions – particularly the Madonna image that is used in *In Dubious Battle*. At the lab, Campbell, Ricketts and Steinbeck often discussed books and ideas but never political or sociological problems. Benson

explains that their discussions were, perhaps, a form of recreation and escape. For example, Campbell was reading Eddington's books on the new physics and Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann*, and ideas emerging from such material were debated along with Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which Steinbeck was using as a 'pillow book' at the time (Benson, 1984: 223).

This was also the time during which Steinbeck was, unwittingly, gathering material which he would later use in *Tortilla Flat* and in *Cannery Row*. The adventures of various paisanos, some of them sons of well-known families, added light relief to the lab discussions and were treated as a kind of contemporary folklore. Since almost everyone was out of work at the time, a bum was not necessarily an illiterate, slothful person, and many of all their varieties visited the lab to join in the discussions and, at times, the parties fuelled by drinks made up of lab alcohol by Ed and John. During one of these parties held to 'welcome' Campbell, he remembers a drive to the place described in *Cannery Row* where the flagpole skater was doing his little dance on a platform high up in the air (Benson, 1984: 223-224).

Benson is of the opinion that Steinbeck's success with *The Pastures of Heaven* improved his outlook on life and made him more receptive so that his circle of acquaintances became larger, including notables such as the Jungian psychoanalyst Evelyn Ott, and Francis Whitaker, a blacksmith and metal sculptor who was also a radical political leader in the local John Reed Club. Considering that Steinbeck was busy writing *To a God Unknown* at the time, the addition of Ott to their social circle was also a fortunate coincidence and Carol recalls discussions on racial memory, among others, which are alluded to in *To a God Unknown* as well as in some of Steinbeck's other literary works. This is discussed in more detail later on. According to Carol, however, Ott was somewhat reluctant to talk shop. Whitaker and his wife, on the other hand, tried hard to convert John and Carol to their socialistic point of view and through

them the Steinbecks met people active in the farm labour movement which later on provided material for *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Benson also states that although Steinbeck remained skeptical of Whitaker's politics, he admired him as a craftsman and as a man, and used him twenty years later as one of the models for the grandfather, Samuel Hamilton, in *East of Eden* (1984: 224-225).

In February of 1932 Ricketts hired Carol to work for him as bookkeeper-secretary and she and John often accompanied Ed on collecting trips to Olema, near the Point Reyes lighthouse north of San Francisco. These were happy times for the Steinbecks and Benson recalls the sense of zany fun that they maintained in an otherwise harrowing period in American history:

Once when Ed had gone collecting by himself, several boxes of turtles were delivered to the lab, and Carol typed out labels that said, 'The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks', until she couldn't type any more. Then she and John pasted them on top of the shells of the turtles and let them loose in the lab and office. On another occasion, they took a two-foot-long iguana, strapped a roller skate on it, and led it around town on a dog leash (Benson, 1984: 224-225).

Ed's lab played such an important part in Steinbeck's development as a writer, that it deserves closer scrutiny. Benson points out that some who have written about it have elevated its gatherings to a sort of unofficial branch of the American Philosophical Society, 'but nothing so exalted or romantic took place' (1984: 226). Virginia Scardigli, a writer and habitué of the lab, remembers the prevailing atmosphere there as one of 'let's dig – let's find out': a spirit that was in large part generated by Ed. Benson names some 26 'regulars' who, in a time without television and without money for other kinds of entertainment, gathered at the informal and unannounced 'meetings' that literally 'took place' at the lab during the thirties and up to Ed's death in 1948. They included many who had some connection with writing (notably the author Henry Miller) or the

newspapers and periodicals, but also scientists, composers, painters and sculptors, among others. Although almost all of them were political liberals, there were also socialists. While political discussion was allowed at John's 11th Street house, politics and social problems were frowned upon at the lab where Ed was, to some extent, the mediator and moderator. The 'digging' included reading-aloud sessions from essays of Jung, to poems by Jeffers, the latest Huxley novel, or stories by Saroyan. James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, with its pile up of syllables and words, was managed by each person taking a turn at reading until running out of breath. But Steinbeck more often chose to read something for escape, including at one occasion, *The Patchwork Girl from Oz*. The 'digging' could also include listening to and discussing music – John and Ed's favourites included Bach, but also Gregorian chant. On another occasion, they listened to a recording of an African drummer and counted the different kinds of rhythms. Most evenings included a review of all the old songs, with Steinbeck carrying the melody an octave lower than the rest, while Toby Street, who apparently sang an excellent bass, could sometimes get carried away with 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' so that visits from the law were not unheard of. There were also games, costume parties which parodied the dress and affectations of the wealthy (without having to spend money on clothing), automatic writing sessions and seances. Benson concludes:

One could turn the kaleidoscope and see in the lab a collection of sages and explorers, artists and philosophers spinning in their orbits of curiosity and enthusiasm about the nucleus of Ed Ricketts's acceptance. Turn the kaleidoscope again and the lab might resemble nothing so much as a neighbourhood bar, a place for people who were too poor to go anyplace else to get together to drink and talk, joke and tell stories, and sing (1984: 228).

Final aspects that require attention at this stage are Steinbeck's inner feelings about his art and how these were influenced by his philosophy. As pointed out by Benson, Steinbeck was almost alone among important fiction writers in his country and of his

own generation with regard to his interest in formal philosophy. But he was secretive about this aspect of his art because he feared that voicing his thoughts would contaminate and weaken the integrity of his art. According to Benson, his art was not a by-product of his ego, but had a separate, important existence of its own:

For all his talk about his work in letters and other private documents, he really tells very little about what he is thinking, what he is aiming for, and what he means. Throughout his career he had his secrets, and he kept them rather well from even his closest friends. He felt that art should be a mystery, and that mystery should not be diluted or dissipated by outside discussion or explanation. The code baldly stated is, no matter how many people misunderstand or how often, an artist must keep his mouth shut. If he is going to talk, let him talk about the weather or the price of eggs (Benson, 1984: 232-233).

But, as stated before, Steinbeck – in contradiction to the public role that he assumed – must be seen as an intellectual if we define an intellectual as one who is interested in ideas for their own sake. And in spite of his general suspicion of most academics (he deeply respected some, such as Professor Eugene Vinaver, who shared his interest in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*), he was really a scholar himself. He spent a good deal of his life doing research, in written documents and in the field, as witnessed by his travels to the Mendocino area in order to study the forest that he was writing about in 'To an Unknown God' and his sojourn in England to survey the 'vales of Avalon' for his final work on the *Morte d'Arthur* legend.

According to Benson, his reading of philosophy was also a private matter and he did not discuss it with his college roommates, his closest friends (up to the time he met Ed), or with his wife and family. Benson also warns against the dangers of working backward from fiction to an underlying philosophy from a specific source: 'The critic is going to see in the background those sources he may be familiar with, not necessarily those

which may have shaped the thoughts of the writer'. Hence, teachers of American literature may see American thinkers and writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman as influences in *The Grapes of Wrath* and then be tempted to place Steinbeck's thought, as a whole, within the American tradition of transcendentalism, for example (Benson, 1984: 233).

Benson goes even further by saying that despite the preacher-character Casy's speech at the beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath*, when he speculates that 'maybe all men got one big soul ever'bodys a part of', Steinbeck was not in the least a Transcendentalist. This is in contrast to French, who at least grants that Steinbeck's thought may be equated with a characteristically American philosophy of life, which is in line with transcendental ideas that have been widespread among American intellectuals (French, 1961: 10). Benson, on the other hand, postulates that even though Casy's words are deliberately Emersonian in order to give further evidence, along with the novel's title, to the American, rather than foreign roots of the revolution described, there is no evidence that Steinbeck was particularly fond of Emerson. Steinbeck did, however, together with Ricketts, share an admiration for Whitman's lustiness and celebration of the natural. Benson is of the opinion that the sentiment behind Casy's words was inspired by Steinbeck's reading of Jung and Bodin (later on examined in more detail), and that his ideas about the human community in *The Grapes of Wrath* (and in *To a God Unknown*) probably came less from Jefferson (also a Transcendental thinker) than from the tradition that inspired Jefferson (Benson, 1984: 233-234).

Benson traces Steinbeck's almost intuitive companionship with nature, as evident in *To a God Unknown*, for example, to his parents' real, rather than professed, Christian attitude toward the natural world. It was a relationship that made him particularly receptive to the Greek concept of nature – first as a boy who had the Greek myths read to him, then as a teenager who read about the ancient Greeks, and as a life-long student who studied Greek civilisation at university and beyond. Benson states that, in

contrast to Ricketts, who rebelled against his family's Episcopalianism, Steinbeck appears simply to have 'ignored it', never finding it particularly relevant. Instead, he found a 'companionable relationship' with nature (Benson, 1984: 234).

Benson's view may, in part, be true, but I believe that religious beliefs (Christian, in Steinbeck's case) established in childhood cannot, later on, be simply 'ignored' in the hope that they will disappear without a trace, or blithely be regarded as 'irrelevant'. The roots of such world views nurtured by parents, for better or for worse, reach far too deep. An eminent modern scholar such as Professor Willem de Klerk (with a background as minister of religion, Professor of Calvinistic Philosophy at the University of Potchefstroom, clinical psychologist, and Editor-in-Chief, for many years, of South Africa's major Afrikaans Sunday paper, *Rapport*) is of the opinion that religious views established in childhood, however naive we find them to be in adulthood, are supplanted only with great difficulty. The vacuum left by the renunciation (or by the conscious negation) of such beliefs, has to be filled by an alternative world view which, in itself, can become a life-long quest for especially, sensitive, intelligent seekers after truth such as Steinbeck surely was, despite his, sometimes, coarser facade. This aspect will be dealt with in more detail in a subsequent chapter on Steinbeck's 'religion'. It is briefly touched on here as it is an important component of the forces that shaped his philosophy and that motivated his novel, *To a God Unknown*. Furthermore, I intend to show, in a subsequent chapter, that Steinbeck's often-stated yearning for the ability to 'break through', which he had in common with Ed Ricketts, was seated in his life-long search after the elusive will 'o the wisp of Truth that he desperately needed to take the place of formal religion, or 'churchianity', that he came so deeply to distrust and despise, as mentioned above.

At this juncture, it is necessary to take a brief look at the final stages of the production of the manuscript of *To a God Unknown* before it was eventually published by Ballou in 1933. By mid-February of that year, the Steinbecks' situation had become impossible.

They decided to pack up the car and, as Steinbeck wrote in a letter to Ballou at the time, 'drive until we can't buy gasoline any more' because Carol felt that she would 'rather go out and meet disaster, than to have it sneak up on her' (Benson, 1984: 257). They got to the resort-retirement community of Laguna Beach where they rented a shack with a tar-paper roof in the poor part of town. Carol completed the typing of the manuscript, but they did not have enough money for the packing material or for the postage. John climbed up to the roof of their shack and cut off two overlapping pieces of tar paper and used them to bind the manuscript. Shortly afterwards, an old-time friend of John's, Polly Smith, stopped by and found them in good spirits but completely broke. She substituted the tar paper cover for John's manuscript with a proper cover (which she bought) and also supplied the money for the postage and registration (Benson, 1984: 257-258). The novel was published in due course and Steinbeck, who had earlier on made a start on *The Red Pony*, continued with his writing.

John Steinbeck felt deeply indebted to Dook Sheffield whose continued support was an important factor in enabling him to survive. In recognition of this, he gave Sheffield the ledger in which the hand-written manuscripts of both *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown* were contained. In this grey cloth account book with red reinforcing on the spine, were, in addition to the manuscripts, several notes addressed to Dook and written at various times during the making of *To a God Unknown*. With these notes, according to Benson, Steinbeck started a tradition of personalising his work by addressing it (in his mind) to an individual, instead of to a large and unfamiliar future audience that he found intimidating to visualise. His journal for *East of Eden*, for example, was addressed to Pascal Covici, his publisher at that time (1952) and was published posthumously as *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* in 1969. Among the notes addressed to Dook are the following lines expressing Steinbeck's affection and gratitude:

I should like you to have this book and my reasons are all sentimental and therefore, of course, unmentionable. I love you very much. I have never before been able to give you a present that cost any money. It occurs to me that you might accept a present that cost me a hell of a lot of work ... I wonder if you know why I address this manuscript to you. You are the only person in the world who believes I can do what I set out to do. Not even I believe that all the time. And so, in a kind of gratitude I address all my work to you, whether or not you know it (Benson, 1984: 259).

552 08326 7

CORGI
BOOKS

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

John Steinbeck

To a God Unknown



CHAPTER FIVE

TO A GOD UNKNOWN: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE TITLE AND EPIGRAPH, AND AN OUTLINE OF THE PLOT

How vast and profound is the influence of the subtile powers of Heaven and Earth. We seek to perceive them, and we do not see them, we seek to hear them and we do not hear them: identified with the substance of things, they cannot be separated from them. They cause that in all the universe men purify and sanctify their hearts and clothe themselves in their holiday garments to offer sacrifices and oblations to their ancestors. It is an ocean of subtile intelligences. They are everywhere, above us on our left, on our right: they environ us on all sides.

The Doctrine of the Mean, Confucius (d. 479 BC)

The epigraph to this chapter is from the third of the Confucian books, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, generally attributed to Tsu Sse, Confucius' grandson, which incorporates many sayings and reminiscences of his grandfather, of which this is one. This passage was also quoted by Thoreau in the Transcendentalist journal *Dial* (Vol. 1V, April 1843), where David Collie's translation was used, according to Lyman V. Caddy in his article 'Thoreau's Quotations from the Confucian Books in Walden' (Godhes, C. et al, 1962: 26). Caddy states that Thoreau's generalised and spiritualised interpretation (of the passage) were made to fit into his own 'immanence transcendentalism' and his feeling for living nature (1962: 27). Although the possibility of influence by Thoreau and other Transcendentalists on Steinbeck's thinking (disputed by Benson, as pointed out in the previous chapter) is not seriously at issue here, it is interesting to note that, like the Transcendentalists, Steinbeck also derived inspiration from the Orient and took one of The Vedic hymns from the *Rigveda* ('Hymn to the Unknown God'), celebrating the Creator of all things, as the epigraph for his novel, *To a God Unknown* (Benson, 984: 171). However, the extract from Confucius quoted above (and as interpreted by

Thoreau) is so close to the theme of Steinbeck's book that he may just as easily have used it instead of 'Hymn to the Unknown God' to set the tone for his narrative. This point is made in order to illustrate the difficulty that one encounters in accepting categorical statements such as the one made by Benson, that Steinbeck 'was not even in part a Transcendentalist', and hence (one would assume), impervious to the influences of the prevailing philosophical thought of his time and place (Benson, 1984: 233-234). I believe, as stated before, that French is closer to the truth when he postulates that, although Steinbeck may not have been specifically influenced by the Transcendentalists, their ideas have been fairly widespread in America and have come to be regarded as constituting a characteristically American philosophy of life: 'Steinbeck's enthusiasm for these ideas, therefore, gives him a place in the development of a distinctive and distinguished American tradition'(French, 1961: 10). Steinbeck's choice of a passage from the *Rigveda* as the epigraph for his novel was therefore, in my view, motivated not only by Oriental thought, but also by a Transcendentalist influence along with ancient Greek philosophy and other influences that will be examined in more detail below when Steinbeck's 'religion' and his non-teleological thinking are dealt with.

With reference to the title and epigraph of his novel, Steinbeck also interpreted his source material to fit his own purposes as Thoreau did, but Steinbeck went even further: he re-phrased and even structurally altered the hymn to suit the theme of his novel. The original hymn (*Rigveda*, Book X, No.121), according to Lisca, has ten stanzas, not six. Steinbeck combined five and six, seven and eight, and also omitted the first and last stanzas. Lisca points out that the omissions were significant because the first stanza invokes 'Hiranyagarba', 'the golden seed', and the last stanza is a prayer for fertility and increase – aspects that did not suit the purposes of his epigraph. Other minor omissions and changes pointed out by Lisca include making the rhythm more regular and patterning it on that of the Psalms. The most important change, according to Lisca, is: '... that where other versions follow the original in giving the lines 'May He not injure us, Who is the begetter of earth, the true and faithful one who begat the sky, who begat the

great and shining waters' as a prayer, a request, Steinbeck makes them interrogative: 'May He not hurt us, He who made earth,/ Who made the sky and the shining sea?' This change, from prayer to question, is basic to the novel because it is not only concerned with the problem of 'Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?' (as the hymn's refrain indicates), but also with the nature of man's proper relation to that unknown God, and with the God's divine right to 'hurt us'. This relationship is explored by Steinbeck through various perspectives and is brought to a climax of revelation in the great drought and the final sacrifice that Joseph, the protagonist, makes to end it (Lisca, 1958: 41-42). Steinbeck, in a letter of 11 February 1933 to Robert O. Ballou, stated (apparently in reply to Ballou's questions), that 'The hymn *To a God Unknown* was, of course, written about three thousand years ago. It must have been chanted, but I know of no music. The disadvantage of setting Sanskrit characters in the end papers is that it would give an Eastern look to the book' (Steinbeck, E. and R. Wallsten, 1975: 69). Steinbeck's concern about not giving the book an 'Eastern look' may imply that he wanted it to have a thoroughly American flavour, in spite of its link with Oriental mysticism. The complete text of Steinbeck's version of the hymn reads as follows:

He is the giver of breath, and strength is his gift.

The high Gods revere his commandments.

His shadow is life, his shadow is death;

Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

Through His might He became lord of the living
and glittering world

And he rules the world and the men and the beasts.

Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

From His strength the mountains take being, and
the sea, they say,

And the distant river;

And these are his body and his two arms.
Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

He made the sky and the earth, and His will
fixed their places,
Yet they look to Him and tremble.
The risen sun shines forth over Him.
Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

He looked over the waters which stored His power
and gendered the sacrifice.
He is God over Gods.
Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

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

Veda

In addition to 'Hymn to the Unknown God', there is another possible source for the novel's title to be found in the Bible, where the Apostle Paul refers to an altar in Athens dedicated 'To The Unknown God'. Steinbeck, however, emphatically stated that he was not referring to the Biblical source in the title of his novel. In an earlier letter to Ballou dated 3 January 1933, Steinbeck said: 'The title will be *To a God Unknown*. The transposition in words is necessary to a change in meaning. The *unknown* in this case meaning "Unexplored". This is taken from the Vedic hymns. I want no confusion with the *unknown God of St. Paul*' (Steinbeck, E. and R. Wallsten, 1975: 67). The biblical text reads as follows:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ... For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said. For we are also his offspring.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

(Acts, XVII, 22-25, 28-29)

Steinbeck's earlier (*Rigveda*-derived) version of the title for his novel, 'To an Unknown God', differs from the biblical words only in the usage of the indefinite article ('an' as opposed to 'the'), and according to Peter Lisca, knowledge of these two sources is important because the tensions between them (pagan and Christian, pantheistic and anthropomorphic) are reflected not only in the novel's plot, but also in its main characters:

The four Wayne brothers [Joseph, Thomas, Burton and Benjy], Father Angelo, and the old man who lives by the sea: each has a different conception of man's relationships to 'The Unknown God'. The meaning of the novel is the pattern woven by these different approaches, that of Joseph providing the thread of the plot (Lisca, 1958: 43).

Before outlining the plot, it is necessary to define briefly what is meant by the term 'plot' in the context of this dissertation. According to E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, a

story is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, but the emphasis falls on causality which overshadows the aspect of time sequence in which events occur. Whereas the telling of a story may inspire the spellbound audience to ask 'and then?' the plot, in addition to curiosity, demands intelligence and memory, and may lead the attentive and thoughtful audience to also wonder 'why?' (Forster, 1962: 93-94). In the outline of the novel that follows, I shall attempt to narrate the sequence of main events that constitute the story of *To a God Unknown*, but I shall also, in general terms, deal with the causality of certain connected events that constitute the plot. The three 'Steinbeck elements', namely, religion, non-teleological thinking and allegory, which are interwoven in the fabric of the narrative and which form an integral part of the novel's thematic development, will only be given cursory attention as they are dealt with in more detail later on. The necessarily limited scope of this dissertation, in any case, prohibits an in-depth analysis of each instance where these elements appear in the novel.

In this chapter it is therefore intended only to indicate selected threads of the narrative in the context of the aforementioned three Steinbeck elements that combine to form the strands of warp and weft that constitute the basic fabric of the plot. A detailed examination of the multi-hued weft threads that, at a distance, blend to reveal the full pointillistic picture woven into the rich tapestry of the narrative would be an over-ambitious undertaking in a dissertation of this nature. Such an examination would have to take cognisance of many myths and religions, including that of the Fisher King, the Grail Legend, sun worship, vegetation rituals, Oriental mythology as well as Christianity and Oriental religions among others. As in *Cup of Gold*, the infusion of such a diversity of myths, metaphors, symbols and other elements was viewed as pretentious and unrealistic by many critics, with the exception of individuals such as William Owens, who viewed Steinbeck's conflation of Christian belief and pagan mystery as a statement that emphasised his idea of union behind the Jungian idea of mankind's search for its own being through the employment of myth and metaphor. This aspect, dealt with by William

Scott Simkins in his paper entitled 'The Metaphor of Myth in *To a God Unknown*: John Steinbeck and Joseph Campbell' (1998), is discussed in more detail below.

In order to find an orientation for the narrative of the novel within the context of American history, it may be useful to take a brief look at events that led to and followed upon the so-called Louisiana Purchase that opened up the West to new settlers such as Joseph Wayne, the protagonist of *To a God Unknown*. According to Simon Berthon and Andrew Robinson in their book, *The Shape of the World*, the eyes of most movers and shakers in the young nation of the United States, increasingly turned west in the 1790s. Thomas Jefferson, the first Secretary of State, and from 1800 the President, was especially interested in expansion. In 1803 Napoleon Bonaparte had just forced Spain to return to France the area called Louisiana – all the land between the 49th parallel in the north, the Mississippi in the east, and the ill-defined 'Stony Mountains' (Rocky Mountains) in the far west. Napoleon suddenly decided to sell it to the United States, fearing that the land would be grabbed by the British in the coming war between Britain and France. The price agreed on was \$15 million, some four million dollars more than the Congress representative in Paris had been authorised to pay. But that sum had been intended to buy just the city of New Orleans, not an empire! Berthon and Robinson describe the immediate impact of this land sale, which was the biggest in history (and at a bargain-basement price), as follows:

The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the size of the United States. The new area was 828 000 square miles (2.14 million sq. km): two-thirds the size of India. At one stroke it opened the prospect of expanding the country to the very shores of the Pacific Ocean, where American ships travelling via Cape Horn had already cornered a highly profitable trade in furs from the American north-west to the Orient. The acquisition gave Americans a new idea of themselves, the idea of the West, that would dominate their imaginations for the rest of the century. The West would become, at various periods, sometimes simultaneously, 'the great

empty continent, Eldorado or Cibola, a barren waste of heathen savages and Spaniards, the passage to India, an imperial frontier, a beaver kingdom, the great American Desert, a land of flocks and herds, a pastoral paradise, an agricultural Arcadia, a military and administrative problem, a bonanza of gold and silver, a safety valve, a haven for saints, a refuge for bad men, and ultimately, toward the end of the nineteenth century, an enormous laboratory', in the words of William H. Goetzmann's prize-winning *Exploration and Empire* [New York, 1966: name of publisher not given] (1991: 155-156).

The Louisiana Purchase facilitated further expansion to the Pacific coast which would soon be linked to the vast Mississippi basin and the further reaches of the East with new railway lines and roads. The new 'sea gates' opened up trade with hitherto almost inaccessible parts of the world and during the nineteenth century, the United States, along with Great Britain, truly became the wealthiest and most powerful nations in the world. One of the great Americans who saw the acquisition of the new land and the prosperity that it brought, as an inheritance received from God, was Abraham Lincoln, who, in his proclamation of 30 April 1863 as a day of prayer and fasting, said: 'We find ourselves in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards fertility of soil, extent of territory, and salubrity of climate ... We ... find ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or establishment of them ... It is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God ... and to recognise the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord ... We have been the recipients of the choicest blessings of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God! We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that these blessings were produced by some superior

wisdom and virtue of our own' (<http://www.americanreligion.org/cultwtch/identity.html>).

/AT-article

Without dwelling on the history or entering the heated debate on the validity of the so-called 'Identity Movements', previously termed Anglo-Israelism or British-Israelism, extant in the United States today, it is necessary, at least, to take cognisance of the fact that certain Americans in times as early as the eighteenth century already believed that their country was bequeathed to them in accordance with God's promises made to Abraham: 'They [ideas concerning the Anglo-Israelite hypothesis espoused by Richard Brothers (1757-1824), a Canadian-born visionary] did not receive serious attention until 1840 when John Wilson published his restatement of them in *Our Israelitsh (sic) Origin*' (<http://www.americanreligion.org/cultwtch/identity.html>). In brief, it is one of the basic beliefs of adherents to this hypothesis, that promises made to Abraham were passed on via Joseph, son of Isaac, to his sons Ephraim (identified with Great Britain) and Manasseh (the United States of America). There is absolutely no evidence that Steinbeck was in any way associated with or in agreement with these hypotheses, but he was, no doubt, aware of them and they may have played a role, even subconsciously, in the choice of theme of his novel which has certain biblical overtones, including a 'promised land'. This is one of many interesting aspects that deserve further exploration which cannot be pursued within the limited scope of this dissertation.

To a God Unknown basically tells the story of Joseph Wayne, aged thirty-five, who, in 1902 (Steinbeck's birth year, incidentally), leaves his father and the land of his birth in Vermont, New England, because he feels that the farm will not cater for the growing needs of his three brothers and their families. That is the reason which he offers his aged father, but he also confesses to 'a hunger' for land of his own, and his astute father furthermore hints at the possibility of discord between the brothers. Joseph convinces his father that good, cheap land is to be had in California and the father grants him permission to leave and promises that his spirit will follow him westward after his death:

I'll go right along with you, over your head, in the air. I'll see the land you pick out and the kind of house you build. I'd be curious about that you know. There might even be some way I could help you now and then. Suppose you lose a cow, maybe I could help you find her; being up in the air like that I could see things far away. If only you wait a little while I can do that Joseph (1933: 9).

A month before his departure, his father – a bearded patriarch reminiscent of the biblical Jacob – bestows the patriarchal blessing upon his son by having him place his hand under his thigh, in the time-honoured manner described in Genesis 47: 29. Although he is not the eldest, Joseph receives the blessing because he is his father's favourite son and because his father sees in him greater strength than in his brothers, a quality that is 'more sure and inward' (Steinbeck, 1933: 8). This is one of many instances in the novel that reminds us of the biblical story of Joseph recorded in Genesis 35 to 50. The story of the novel by no means parallels the biblical narrative, but there are sufficient threads reminiscent of the Old Testament woven into the plot to lend a certain biblical texture to the fabric of the novel. This texture is enhanced by the biblical patterns of speech and narration found in the novel.

Nowhere in the novel is mention made of Joseph's mother. However, as pointed out by Simkins in his aforementioned paper, 'When the valley starts to assume a god-like identity, it is maternal: Nuestra Senora, Our Lady, the Virgin Mother of Christ, the archetypal mother' (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>). This is an example of Steinbeck's unique approach to allegory: Joseph's real mother exists more as an absence than a presence and it is left to the reader to interpret the meaning behind this strange omission in his genealogy. One may view this as a device employed by Steinbeck to emphasise Joseph's god-like qualities and his special relationship to his father who is also pictured as god-like. On the other hand, it may also serve to accentuate Joseph's special relationship with earth, which, in a Jungian sense, may be the anima figure: mother, but also mistress, hag or whore – as the occasion demands.

Examples of the anima figure abound in Jung's work, but ample references may be found in Sir Laurens van der Post's *Jung and the Story of Our Time* (1976). An apt example of the 'absent' or 'abandoned' mother figure may be found in the following description by Jung of Leonardo da Vinci's painting 'The Virgin on the Rocks': 'You see ... there is the eternally feminine soul of man where it belongs in the dark feminine earth. See how tenderly and confidently the Virgin holds in her arms the child – our greater future self. But make no mistake, da Vinci saw her there not only in her Christian role but also joined to her pagan aboriginal version. That is why the painting is so meaningful. She is not just Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is also the feminine soul of man, the everlasting Ariadne. Her immediate uses fulfilled, she is forgotten and abandoned on the rocks ... Rediscovered, as she was briefly in the Renaissance, da Vinci's prophetic self already foresaw that she was about to be abandoned again. The wonder is that unlike Ariadne, the Virgin is not in tears. She is content, confident and unresentful because she is also the love that endureth and beareth all things even beyond faith and hope. She knows that, in the end, the child will grow and all shall be well' (1976: 158).

Joseph is never really described in the way that his brothers are in the novel, but his picture slowly emerges, from the man whose eyes are 'fierce and curious with youth' yet hesitant to confront his father with 'his new heresy' (of wanting to leave home, as depicted on p. 7 of the novel), to the demigod who later on dominates the scene. The eldest brother, Thomas, has 'a strong kinship with all kinds of animals ... but humans he neither understood or trusted very much'. Apart from Joseph's wife, Elizabeth, Thomas' wife, Rama, is the only other woman who plays a small but meaningful role in the novel. She is portrayed as a kind of earth mother, loved and feared by children – and she alone seems to have any real understanding of Joseph's intricate psyche. The next brother, Burton, is a typical Steinbeck Christian: he is narrow, bigoted and destructive. Representative of the ascetic aspect of religion, he 'kept himself from evil and found evil in nearly all close human contacts'. Benjy, the youngest and shortest lived of the clan, is

a weak and purely carnal man who does as little work as possible. He spends his time drinking, singing, and seducing women who seem to find him irresistible (1933: 28-32).

According to French, two of the brothers – Thomas and Benjy – '... recalling the figures on the *Cup of Gold* in Steinbeck's first novel, represent the extremes of physical man; the other two [Burton and Joseph], the extremes of spiritual man. In short, the group personifies body and soul, doubly dichotomised' (1961: 48). The novel follows their fortunes in the new Eden which they have established in California and through them we are shown some of the consequences of 'westerling' (or the pursuit of an American Dream of owning land, in this instance) in an allegory that unfolds largely through the analogy of Joseph's spiritual quest in search of himself and the 'God Unknown'.

The main action of the novel, according to Lisca, concerns Joseph's growing mystic and ritualistic relationship to the land: 'Before he leaves for California, his hunger for land of his own is such as any farmer might feel. As soon, however, as he arrives in the lush valley, his feeling for the land begins to take on a symbolic meaning' (1958: 44). The novel tells about the way in which the land, described increasingly in anthropomorphic and feminine terms, at first gains possession of Joseph's senses and, later on, of his whole being. His initial infatuation is described as follows:

As he rode, Joseph became timid and yet eager, as a young man is who slips out to a rendezvous with a wise and beautiful woman. He was half-drugged and overwhelmed by the forest of Our Lady. There was a curious femaleness about the interlacing boughs and twigs, about the long green cavern cut by the river through the trees and the brilliant underbrush. The endless green halls and aisles and alcoves seemed to have meanings as obscure and promising as the symbols of an ancient religion. Joseph shivered and closed his eyes. 'Perhaps I'm ill', he said. 'When I open my eyes I may find that all this is delirium and fever'. (Steinbeck, 1933: 11).

Joseph mistrusts his feelings but in trying to think about home and his father, he suddenly feels that all the events of his childhood are lost, and he intuitively senses that his father is dead and has become united with the new land. As Joseph rides along the ancient game trail towards the site of his new home, he comes across a wild boar eating a piglet that is still alive. His face contorts with rage and he aims his rifle at the pig – but then comes to his senses: 'I'm taking too great power in my hands', he says to himself. 'Why, he's the father of fifty pigs and he may be the source of fifty more' (1933: 13). This is an example of non-teleological thinking on Joseph's part when he overcomes the first, 'normal', teleological instinct to interpret cannibalism in nature as 'unnatural' and, even, 'evil', and to 'punish the perpetrator'.

According to Simkins, Joseph has been preoccupied with asking 'why?' up to this point in the novel. Becoming has interested him more than being. Simkins quotes Campbell as saying that 'becoming is always fractional and being is total'. Simkins continues: 'Becoming is also teleological, and being is non-teleological. As being encompasses becoming, so non-teleology subsumes teleology' (1998: 10). Steinbeck confirmed this in his exposition of what he meant by this concept in his *Log From the Sea of Cortez*, where he wrote: 'Teleological "answers" necessarily must be included in the non-teleological method since they are part of the picture even if only restrictedly true' (1941: 170). According to Simkins, Campbell and Steinbeck believed that myth helped people to break through the illusion of teleological thinking to a non-teleological acceptance of life. According to Simkins, Campbell said in video-recorded interviews with Joseph Campbell by Bill Moyers, entitled 'The Power of Myth' (Mystic Fire Video, 800/446-9784, no date supplied) that:

I don't believe life has a purpose ... Life is a lot of protoplasm with an urge to reproduce and continue in being ... Just sheer life cannot be said to have a purpose, because look at all the different purposes it has all over the place. But each incarnation ... has a potentiality, and the mission of life is to live that potentiality (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimikins/myth5.html>).

Simkins also expresses the seemingly contradictory opinion that Joseph Wayne is a teleological man with mythic sensibilities, who searches vainly to fulfil his potential because he realises too late the unity of existence and its non-teleological nature. This argument is pursued in the next chapter of this dissertation.

When he reaches his tent under the huge oak tree, Joseph is overcome by love and possessiveness for his new land: "This is mine" (he said) and his eyes sparkled with tears and his brain was filled with the wonder that the land should be his. There was a pity in him for the grass and the flowers and he felt that the trees were his children and the land his child: "It's mine ... and I must take care of it" (1933: 15). His tenderness turns to a kind of lust, however, as he stands in the damp grass:

'It's mine ... Down deep its mine, right to the centre of the world'. ... He flung himself face downwards on the grass and pressed his cheek against the wet stems. His fingers gripped the wet grass and tore it out, and gripped it again. His thighs beat heavily on the earth. The fury left him and he was cold and bewildered and frightened at himself ... For in a moment the land had been his wife (1933: 15).

That evening as Joseph sits at his dying campfire, he watches the 'golden face' of the moon 'rising through the bars of the pine-trunks'. Then, for a moment, 'a sharp pine tree pierced the moon and was withdrawn as the moon arose' (1933: 16). Peter Lisca points out that this relates to the 'symbolic copulation' described in the novel (1958: 44).

In Joseph's ritual copulation with the earth, this 'virgin land' takes on the Jungian guise of lover, wife – in sharp contrast to the mother image with which earth is usually associated. But Joseph also views his new land as his child which he must protect, and this also serves to emphasise his feelings of tenderness and love towards the living

earth. A Jungian analogy may be found in van der Post's description of Jung's dream of being embraced by a young girl with a dove, image of the Holy Spirit, in a Renaissance setting, as if to say: 'Whatever happens, I shall be there with you at the end, for I, child that I am, am mother of your future self' (1976: 213).

The timber for his new home is delivered by horse-drawn wagons and Joseph becomes acquainted with the teamsters. They are Romas, the rough-hewn leader, his son Willie who is plagued by strange nightmares which his father attributes to eating too much, and Juanito, a blue-eyed, half-caste Amerindian who insists that he is a full-blooded Castillian – a claim that Romas makes fun of. Joseph wins Juanito's undying respect and loyalty when he agrees that Juanito is indeed a Castillian because 'his eyes are blue, and there's something else besides. I don't know how I know it, but I think he is' (1933: 19). Juanito understands Willie's fears and comforts him when he is troubled by his dreams. Like Jung, Steinbeck also attaches great importance to dreams. Willie's nightmares of being in a 'bright place that is dry and dead', may be viewed as a warning to Joseph that the great drought is on its way (1933: 22). Jung, for example, is quoted by van der Post as indicating the prophetic value of dreams as follows: '... dreams cannot [wait] because they come unsolicited from within and point urgently to the way you must go' (1976: 213). Joseph, unfortunately, fails to pay heed to the meaning of Willie's dreams, as he also chooses to disregard the warnings of the paisanos (which translates as 'countrymen' from Spanish) that he spoke to earlier on with regard to the recurrent drought cycles in the area. In denying this threat, explained to him by 'countrymen' who are familiar with the weather patterns in their part of the world, he succumbs to wishful thinking (a form of teleological reasoning) which is contrary to his nature and to the nature of the land that he seeks to be part of. He falls into the trap of wanting to believe that by ignoring an unpleasant probability it will simply 'go away'.

Joseph builds his house under the protective limb of a large oak tree, and when he receives confirmation about his father's death in a letter from his brother Burton, he fancies that his father's spirit has entered the tree. Juanito, who visits Joseph to deliver

the aforementioned letter, attaches himself to Joseph as a vaquero who wishes to work for him on the basis of friendship and not for pay, as Joseph had treated him as an equal instead of with the condescension of his previous employer who called him an 'ndio'. When Juanito overhears Joseph talking to the tree, the latter confesses that he believes that his father's spirit has come to live in the tree. Juanito assures him that 'the dead are always here ... they never go away' (1933: 27).

Roughly following the pattern of the biblical narrative, Joseph sends for his brothers and their families to join him and although each of them records a claim of a hundred-and-sixty acres of the rich land adjoining Joseph's, the tribe shares a big barn and the ranch is thought of as a unit: the Wayne Ranch, with Joseph as the father of the homesteads, speaking – like his father before him – 'with the sanction of the grass, the soil, the beasts wild and domesticated' (1933: 32). The brothers build their houses as well as Benjy's (he was too lazy to build his own) and settle down to a period of harmony in labour, sharing the fruits of what can be compared to the seven 'fat years' of the Bible story. Joseph's passion for fertility in his farm animals leads Burton to admonish him about the 'impropriety' of watching cattle mate as if he had a personal interest in the action. Joseph assures him that 'if feeling could put a cow with calf, I could mount a hundred'. He reads the 'grey, sick horror that had come over his brother's face' and explains to Burton that he only wants increase in his livestock. Burton, in turn, tells his brother that he needs prayer more than anything else: 'Come to me when you can pray'. Joseph, reflecting upon his brother's version of religion, says to himself, 'he has a secret that makes everything that I think or do unclean. I have heard the telling of the secret [Burton's religious doctrines] and it means nothing to me' (1933: 34). The differences between the two brothers' approaches to spirituality are made evident by Warren French in his book *John Steinbeck*, when he points out that Joseph symbolises the fecund, fructifying aspect of spiritual man, and that the difference between him and Burton is much the same as that found between ' and the 'imitator' which Emerson expounds in his essay entitled 'The Divinity School Address' (1961: 49). Joseph, in seeking his own truths and acting upon them, measures up to Emerson's 'marks of the

genuine man', as summarised in the introduction to *Emerson Essays* by Sherman Paul: 'He believes in himself; he speaks the truth; he thinks the truth; he acts the truth' (1906: viii). Burton has no truths of his own. He is prepared to accept, without question, 'the word' as 'given' by the preachers at church-camp meetings to 'the people' (1933: 136).

The tree begins to play an increasingly important role in Joseph's life and it soon becomes the object of druidic practices. On the pretext of protecting the fowls in the barnyard, Joseph hangs dead hawks in the tree to frighten off others of their kind, and later on he nails the ear -notchings of calves to the trunk, ostensibly to keep track of their number. He explains to his brother Thomas that, when his father died, he felt that he had lost 'a kind of a last resort, a thing you could tie to, that would never change'. The tree took over that role because 'a man has to have something to tie to, something he can trust to be there in the morning' (1933: 40). Thomas, however, shrewdly guesses that Joseph is also 'working' against the dry years that the older Mexican settlers had told them about.

One day when Joseph rides out with Thomas and Juanito to look for new-born calves, Juanito leads them to a ridge crowned with dark pines surrounding a rock as large as a house. There is a cave in the side of the rock from which water flows in a small stream. The rock, situated in an open glade, resembles a moss-covered altar and beside it they find a reposing black, hornless bull with shining black ringlets on its forehead. The bull plunges into the undergrowth at their arrival and Thomas, insisting that the bull does not belong to their herd, is strangely upset by the incident and clearly afraid of the place. The black bull with 'shining black ringlets on its forehead' [an anthropomorphic image] and 'long, swinging scrotum which hung nearly to the knees' reminds one of the bulls in the ancient Grecian bestiary and serves to accentuate the mythological importance of the grove in the novel. Thomas, who is an unimaginative, almost animalistic man, distrusts anything that he cannot understand and is especially distrustful of mysticism and ritual. Joseph experiences a feeling of déjà vu and whispers: 'This is holy – and this is old. This is ancient – and holy' (1933: 42). Juanito is moved to tears by the

atmosphere in the grove and explains that his mother, whom he now admits was an Indian, had brought him to the place when he was a little boy and she was expecting a baby. He tells Joseph that the old Indians still visit the place and that it was the Indian in him that made him return to the grove. Joseph soothes his brother by telling him that there is something strong and sweet and good in the grove: 'There's something like food in there, and like cool water ... maybe sometime when we have need, we'll go back again – and be fed' (1933: 42-43).

Joseph, feeling that he is the only 'sterile thing' on the ranch, decides that it is time for him to take a wife. He pays a formal visit to the newly-arrived seventeen-year-old school mistress, Elizabeth McGreggor, in the village of Our Lady and almost immediately proposes marriage to her in a stilted manner. Elizabeth, who hails from Monterey, has a classical educational background resting on Homer and Virgil, has read excerpts from Plato and Lucretius and knows several titles from Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Euripides. She is horrified by the crude approach of this uneducated farmer and is totally disillusioned about the value of her 'higher education' as a defence against Joseph's direct approach. Joseph leaves in shame at his own lack of refinement but promises to return 'after we've stopped being embarrassed' (1933: 47). Benjy, who had also come to town, gets drunk as usual and serenades beneath the window of the now distraught, lonely young girl – and she almost gives in to his pleas for her to come down and join him.

In the meantime, Juanito has been courting Alice Garcia, whose parents have a paper to prove that their grandfather had been a Castillian. Joseph and Juanito visit the town once again to court their ladies, and this time Elizabeth knows that she will soon be marrying Joseph. At a later occasion she accompanies Joseph to his ranch on a visit and expresses the wish to climb the oak tree. Joseph encourages her to do so and when he sees how well she fits in the hollow of the crotch of the tree and how the 'arms' guard her, he tells her that his tree loves her. She sees the ridge of pine trees where the great rock is situated from her high perch in the tree and tells Joseph that, once they are

married, she would like to visit the pine grove when she becomes homesick because it reminds her of the pines in Monterey.

Joseph marries Elizabeth in a sombre ceremony held in a Protestant chapel in Monterey. Apart from the joyful peal of the bells at the end of the ceremony which Joseph likens to the voice of the iron god who has 'come late to the wedding', Joseph finds the 'music' of the ceremony to be a 'sunless prophecy' pronouncing the sullen sentence: 'You must endure' (1933: 62-63). Elizabeth finds that when she wants to pray and tries to picture Christ in her mind, a vision of her bearded husband comes to mind. She prays with this image before her: 'In all the time I've had to learn about myself, I have learned nothing. Be kind to me, Lord Jesus, at least until I learn what kind of thing I am' (1933: 63). The couple return to the valley of Our Lady, entering a dangerous mountain pass in order to reach their destination, and Joseph tells Elizabeth: 'This is our marriage – through the pass – entering the passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy. This is the undistorted real'. Elizabeth, in turn, knows that while she will have to go through the pass, 'I'll be leaving myself behind. I'll think of myself standing here looking through at the new one who will be on the other side' (1933: 69).

The newly-married couple is warmly welcomed with gifts and good wishes in Nuestra Señora, but as they approach the ranch in gathering darkness, Joseph sees a cloud formation resembling a goat's head arising from the sea towards the west and looking down upon the valley. They hear the heavy sigh of warm wind rising up out of the valley, stirring the dry grass, and Joseph remarks that 'there is an enemy out tonight. The air is unfriendly' (1933: 76). They are met by Juanito on horseback who rides by and shouts that Joseph will soon be needing him and that he will be waiting at the rock in the pines. When they reach home, they hear that Juanito, on returning early from a trip to Nuestra Señora, found Benjy in bed with his (Juanito's) wife Alice. Juanito didn't wait to identify the man in his bed and stabbed him in the back. Joseph asks Thomas to report the matter to the authorities as an accident. Joseph reports Benjy's death to his tree and

climbs in between the great 'arms' to rest and find solace but realises that he is lonely beyond feeling loneliness, like his father used to be. Rama, Thomas' wife, presides at Elizabeth's grim homecoming and explains to her the matter of Benjy's death and tells her more about her new husband. She assures her: 'You can worship him without fear of being sacrificed' (1933: 84).

Joseph rides out to meet Juanito in the grove where he feels the presence of evil. Juanito asks Joseph to kill him in revenge for his brother's death but Joseph assures him that his act was natural and that there is no call for revenge. This may be seen as another non-teleological reaction on Joseph's part. He does not demand the 'righteous' retribution associated with the 'justice of the Wild West', but rather takes an uninvolved view of the situation and concludes that no reaction is called for. Juanito decides to go away with Willie Romas to a place with horses where he can look after Willie as a kind of penance, until Benjy's 'bones are clean'. Joseph feels glad that he had acted in accordance with nature, 'for within him there was arising the knowledge that his nature and the nature of the land were the same' (1933: 92-3). This feeling forms a sharp contrast to his denial of the reality of recurrent drought cycles, as mentioned earlier on.

Winter settles early on the valley and Joseph sees Jennie, Benjy's widow, off on her journey east to return to her parents. Alice, Juanito's wife, goes to work for Elizabeth and is expecting Juanito's child. Burton prepares to leave for Pacific Grove where he plans to attend a church camp meeting and to spend the next summer. He looks forward to the experience of reciting sins before a gathering of people. Thomas kills a pig and Joseph sees to it that the carcass is hung in the oak tree to bleed in a bucket put out for the purpose by Rama. This is another instance of symbolic blood sacrifice in the Druidic tradition, especially when one considers that it is the archetypal earth mother, Rama, who 'accepts' the sacrifice. Good rains come to the valley and Joseph plans a great fiesta to celebrate New Year's Day. Burton protests against Joseph's idea of inviting Father Angelo, the Catholic priest, to hold a New Year's Mass for the Catholic guests at the fiesta.

At the start of the fiesta, Father Angelo sets up his folding figures of the Madonna and Child as well as a crucifix under the oak tree. Burton hides in his house during the service and tries, unsuccessfully, to drown out the penetrating Latin of the service by praying aloud. To start the fiesta, Joseph pours a libation of wine onto the ground before proposing the toast, and afterwards he secretly pours a little wine on the tree. Father Angelo questions him about it and Joseph explains that there was a fly in the cup. The priest, however, warns him to 'be careful of the groves my son. Jesus is a better Saviour than hamadryad'. He explains that the devil has owned the country for many thousands of years and Christ for only a few. Old habits, sometimes in the guise of the new rule, persist even under the dominion of Christ (1933: 109). Joseph watches while the first dancers tentatively step onto the dancing area and try out ornate dancing steps to intricate guitar rhythms. The guitar music grows heavy and insistent as the day wears on and eventually the dancers become a phalanx with one body, 'and the soul of the body was the rhythm' (1933: 110). The phalanx-like unity of the people is reminiscent of ancient dance rituals practised by aboriginal people in order to obtain favours from the gods. The central idea seems to be that the phalanx is able to achieve more than the divided efforts of individuals, however accomplished they may be. Thomas, afraid of wild emotion as an animal is afraid of thunder, goes to the barn during the fiesta and strokes a horse's neck to soothe himself. He later on finds Burton kneeling and whimpering in a stall. Burton calls the fiesta devil worship and Thomas says that it reminds him of a camp meeting with a great evangelist enlightening the people. This image does not differ much from that of the entranced 'aboriginal' devotions expressed in dance mentioned earlier on. It pleases Thomas to hear Burton's supplications fall into the rhythm of the guitars. A great thunderstorm, which Burton attributes to the wrath of God, breaks up the fiesta. Joseph would, no doubt, have attributed it to God's benevolence in response to the confluence of devotions at the fiesta. Elizabeth finds an undertone of warning in the meaning of the day, but Joseph assures her that her fears are ungrounded although he admits that there are 'things hidden in today' (1933: 115). Elizabeth announces that she is expecting a child and Joseph tells her that he is more

happy than he has ever been before, but he also whispers to himself 'and more afraid'. While Elizabeth pretends to be sleeping, Joseph slips off into the night to tell his tree about the coming of the baby, and he adds: 'There is a storm coming, I know I can't escape it. But you, sir, you might know how to protect us from the storm' (1933: 117-18). He walks up to the barbecue pit and brings back a piece of meat to place in the fork of the tree. Burton sees him and tells him that he has forsaken God and will be struck down if he does not pray with him and repent. He urges him to cut the tree down. Joseph tells Burton not to interfere with his games and to keep to his own.

The great fiesta, marked by a fusion of religious rites and symbolism – including Joseph's Druidic offerings to earth and tree, Father Angelo's Roman Catholic incantations in Latin amidst his holy figures, Burton's prudish Protestantism (turning to almost Pentecostal fervour when it is directed against Catholicism) as well as the 'heathenish', phalanx-like dancing of the natives of mixed origin – seems to be a harbinger of bounteous spring. The grass is thick and emerald green on hills that are 'sleek and fat', and 'rarely did so many cows have two calves as during that spring' (1933: 119). Alice goes home to Nuestra Señora and bears a son whom she brings back to the ranch with her. In Joseph's house there is a quiet preparation for Elizabeth's baby and all the other women, 'well-knowing that this would be the chief child of the ranch and inheritor of power', come to sit with her and help (1933: 120). Joseph works zealously and joyfully, branding his burgeoning herd of cattle, and two more vaqueros have to be hired to help the brothers with the ever-increasing work in a season that seems to burst with fertility.

During the unusual heat of that June, Elizabeth feels sick and irritable with almost everything around her, including the noise of grasshoppers ticking as they fly, the pieces of rusty baling wire on the ground and the nauseating smell of ammonia coming from the barns. Joseph leaves on a trip to San Luis Obispo to buy things needed for the arrival of the baby. Elizabeth, arising early on the morning of his departure, sees the pine grove on the ridge and is overcome with a sharp nostalgia for Monterey,

homesickness for the dark trees of the peninsula, the blue bay with colored fishing boats; but more than anything for the pines' (1933: 122). She persuades Thomas to hitch up old Moonlight, a gentle mare, to a buggy and drives out alone to visit the grove for the first time. To enter the grove, she has to fight her way through a wall of brambles to reach the flat place with the 'huge, misshapen green rock'. Like Joseph before her, she also experiences a feeling of déjà vu: 'I think I knew it was here. Something in my breast told me it was here, this dear good thing'. She becomes enchanted while staring at the rock and 'her mind lost all sharp thoughts and became thronged with slowly turning memories, untroubled, meaningless and vague' (1933: 124). Her attraction to and fascination with the rock reminds one of Jung's life-long love for stone in general, and the affinity that he felt for certain individual rocks as described in many pages of Laurens van der Post's *Jung and the Story of Our Time* (1976). This aspect, as related to Steinbeck's novel, is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Elizabeth awakens from a strange and disturbing dream when her hand touches the cold water of the spring and suddenly the previously soothing rustling of the surrounding forest grows sharp and malicious. The rock takes on an evil shape resembling a crouching animal like a gross and shaggy goat ready to spring at her. She flees the grove and gratefully looks down upon the clustered farm buildings drenched with sun in the valley below her. She recollects her strange and fearful experience in the grove as part of '... an old thing, so old that I have nearly forgotten it ... it was an awful thing'. And she prays: 'Lord Jesus protect me from these forbidden things, and keep me in the way of light and tenderness. Do not let this thing pass through me to into my child, Lord Jesus. Guard me against the ancient things in my blood'. And she remembers how her father had said that his 'ancestors a thousand years ago followed the Druidic way' (1933: 126). She feels relieved after the prayer and blames her strange experience on her condition. On her way back, she remembers to pick an armful of late flowers 'to decorate the house against Joseph's return' (1933: 126). It may not be entirely fatuous to find an element of irony in Elizabeth's fear about the 'ancient things' in her blood, while she doesn't hesitate to pick flowers (a kind of 'floral sacrifice') in honour of her husband who is a god-like (Jesus) figure in her mind!

The summer heat becomes unbearable and by August even the little stream in the riverbed dries up. Burton and his wife pack up and drive off on the ninety-mile trip to Pacific Grove where he intends to spend three weeks at the church camp-meeting while Rama takes care of his children.

Elizabeth becomes increasingly possessive of her husband and, one day while they are sitting on the porch, she abruptly asks him why he loves his tree so much. He tries to explain that he likes it because it is a big, fine tree – but Elizabeth tells him that she had heard him address the tree as 'Sir'. Joseph confesses that 'it gives me a feeling that I have my father yet' and that it is some kind of game that he indulges in. Elizabeth, with 'eyes full of the wisdom of child-bearing', gently tells him that it isn't just a game that he is playing but that it is, nevertheless, a 'good practice'. For the first time she 'sees' into her husband's mind, including 'the shapes of his thoughts' and 'he knew that she saw them'. At this point 'the emotion rushed to his throat. He leaned to kiss her, but instead, his forehead fell upon her knees, and his chest filled to breaking. She stroked his hair and smiled her wise smile. 'You should have let me see before ... but likely I hadn't proper eyes before' (1933: 128-29).

Joseph and Elizabeth become increasingly close to each other and Elizabeth is filled with fear that her husband will not be near her when the time comes for the delivery. Joseph assures her that he will be by her side and she tells him, laughingly, about all her little bits of knowledge that were designed to make her superior and that seem so silly now: '... how the Persians invaded Greece and were beaten, and how Orestes came to the tripod for protection, and the Furies sat waiting for him to get hungry and let go his hold' (1933: 129). Elizabeth's new insight and growing wisdom become evident in her recognition that knowledge without understanding is meaningless.

When Elizabeth's time comes, Joseph insists on taking over from Rama and Alice, and delivers his own son after a long and hard labour. After the birth, he barely looks at his

tree as he walks past it on his way to the barn to speak to Thomas. He nevertheless remarks: 'You are the cycle, and the cycle is too cruel' (1933: 134). He tells Thomas about the birth and they tentatively discuss exploring the area of land beyond the ridge towards the coast. Elizabeth tells Joseph about her visit to the pine grove while he was away and that the green rock frightened her. He promises to think about taking her back to the place so that she can stop dreaming about, and fearing, the rock.

Burton returns exalted from the camp-meeting town of Pacific Grove and describes the lovely peninsula and the blue bay, and 'how the preachers had given the word to the people' (1933: 136). Burton's shallow perception of religion is such that he finds it sufficient to be 'given the word', like a commodity that one can 'receive' without undue questioning. He tells Joseph that he is planning to build a little house there and live out there all year round. He is proud of the 'Wayne expression' which he sees in Elizabeth's baby's eyes and immediately wants to know when they are planning to have the child baptised.

Joseph, in contemplating his wife, comes to the conclusion that she has grown exceptionally wise during her time on the ranch and she laughingly agrees that she has indeed changed: 'I'm split up ... I used to think in terms of things that I have read. I never do now. I don't think at all. I just do things that occur to me' (1933: 137). Such an outlook on life accords with the tenets of the 'Psycho-cybernetic' school of psychological thought that advocates non-procrastinative, almost impulsive action, guided at most by 'automatic, corrective manoeuvres', much as a modern, high technology ballistic missile in full flight is guided by built-in cybernetic mechanisms that effect minuscule changes to its trajectory in order to ensure that it reaches its target. This approach to thinking is the subject of a book by Maxwell Maltz MD, FRCS entitled *Psycho-Cybernetics* (Pocket Books, 1970). If the particular action is true to one's nature, such an approach accords with non-teleological (or 'is') thinking in that one is encouraged to trust one's instincts, much as migratory animals instinctively 'know', without question, when and where to gather in order to migrate. Elizabeth's changed attitude also reminds one of Jung's

precondition for self-discovery as described by van der Post: 'Indeed, one does not begin to discover oneself as an individual until such a dialogue [between what one knows and does not know, between what one is and what one is not] breaks in on an hitherto undiscovered self and some great forever outside space and time and change to which we are all so irrevocably subjected, presents itself'. This would explain Elizabeth's feeling that she is 'split up', since a dialogue presupposes the presence of two participants. Jung, in van der Post's words, adds:

This dialogue is a relentless process of enigmatic question and answer that is to run to the end of one's days. And that other forever in the beginning at all times and places has had one of its most authoritative representations in imagery evoked through stone. Stone, to the inner eye of the candidate for initiation in self-awareness, is the naturally divine in its most lasting and incorruptible physical form (1976: 73).

Elizabeth's visit to the grove and her encounter with the rock, discussed more fully hereunder, precipitated the change in her. Although she is changed by her experience in the grove, she does not always act consistently with her new insights. For example, she still 'blames' the rock in the grove for 'frightening' her, without realising that the rock was only the catalyst that precipitated and gave form to deeper feelings and influences that were already present in her own psyche. Elizabeth is indeed a 'candidate for initiation in self-awareness', as quoted above, but, as a novice, she tragically misreads the metaphysical meaning of the rock as a catalyst that is able to assist her in attaining the greater understanding that she seeks, and instead chooses to 'blame' it as an external force that threatens her. G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), according to Richard Osborne in his book *Philosophy for Beginners*, postulates that reality is constructed by the mind:

The mind does not know this at first. Mind thinks reality is out there, independent of it. Thus mind is alienated from itself. Then it recognises reality as its own creation. It then knows reality as clearly as it knows itself. It is at one with itself ... Every part of the system works through the process of developing self-consciousness (1992: 113).

Joseph decides that his son's name will be John because 'there has always been either a Joseph or a John' [in the family]. Elizabeth agrees that it is a good name and remarks that the many bearers of this name are either good or bad, never neutral: 'If a neutral boy has that name, he doesn't keep it. He becomes Jack'. She hopes the child will never become Jack: 'I'd rather you were very bad than Jack', she tells her baby (1933: 137-38). The significance of names in the novel is also dealt with more extensively in the next chapter.

Joseph suggests to Elizabeth that it is about time to allow their son to sit in the tree and adds that he plans to make a seat for the baby in a the crotch, and 'when he is a little older I might cut steps in the bark for him to climb on'. He assures her that the tree would never let the child fall. At this stage the tree is described as less than luxuriant in appearance: 'The leaves had lost their shine under a coat of summer dust. The bark was pale grey and dry' (1933: 139). Burton happens to arrive on the scene and 'into his eyes there came a look of horror and of pleading. He stepped forward and put a restraining hand on Joseph's shoulder. "Please don't do it", he begged' (1933: 139). Joseph is considerate enough to concede to Burton's request, but he refuses to 'swear never to do it again' in order to assuage his brother's fear of 'letting the devil in': 'No, I won't swear', he tells Burton. 'I won't give up my thing to your thing. Why should I?' He assures Burton that if he is afraid of bringing divine punishment down upon the family, then he (Joseph) is prepared to take the punishment for refusing to be limited in his activities. Burton explains to Elizabeth that her husband is denying Christ: 'He is worshipping as the old pagans did. He is losing his soul and letting in the evil'. 'I'm denying no Christ', Joseph says sharply, 'I'm doing a simple thing that pleases me'.

Burton, however, tells Joseph that he is 'going away from this wrong' by selling up his part of the ranch and moving to Pacific Grove where he intends to open up a store. He explains that 'the rot' was already in their father and that his dying words showed how far it had gone:

I saw the thing even before you started for the West. If you had gone among people who knew the Word and were strong in the Word, the thing might have died – but you came here ... The mountains are too high ... the place is too savage. And all the people carry the seed of this evil thing in them. I've seen them, and I know. I saw the fiesta, and I know. I can only pray that your son will not inherit the rot (1933: 138-141).

Even when Joseph finally agrees to swear to keep the promise that Burton wishes to impose upon him ('I don't know how I'll keep it, but I'll swear'), Burton refuses to accept his brother's placatory efforts: 'No, Joseph, you love the earth too much. You give no thought to the hereafter. The force of an oath is not strong in you' (1933: 140-141). Elizabeth smiles with a kind of contemptuous amusement and tells her husband that she thinks that Burton really wants to go. Joseph agrees and adds that Burton is also 'really afraid of my sins too'. When Elizabeth asks Joseph whether he is sinning, he answers:

'No ... I'm not sinning. If Burton were doing what I am, it would be sin. I only want my son to love the tree'. He stretched out his hands for the baby, and Elizabeth put the swathed little body in his hands. Burton looked back as he was entering his house, and he saw that Joseph was holding the baby within the crotch of the tree, and he saw how the gnarled limbs curved up protectively about it (1933: 141-142).

Burton gets ready to leave within a week and when Joseph, once again, expresses his regret at his brother's decision, Burton tells him that his wife Harriet is unhappy on the ranch and that he, himself, never really wanted to be a farmer. He adds, passionately :

'I've tried to lead an acceptable life. What I have done I have done because it seemed to me to be right. There is only one law. I have tried to live in that law. What I have done seems right to me, Joseph. Remember that. I want you to remember that' (1933: 143).

Joseph, smiling affectionately, assures Burton that 'this is a wild country. If you do not love it, there is only hatred left. You've had no church to go to. I don't blame you for wanting to be among people who carry your own thoughts'. He finally pats his brother's shoulder and tells him: 'I offered to swear, and I would have tried to keep the oath' (1933: 143).

The families feel sad about Burton's departure but Thomas assures Joseph, who blames himself for the breach, that Burton had left because he had wanted to do so all along. Joseph, looking at his tree, suddenly senses that there is something wrong with it. Elizabeth encourages him to go on an errand to Nuestra Señora to collect some fruit trees in order to take his mind off his sense of guilt over Burton's departure and his worry about the tree, and Joseph reluctantly takes her advice. Driving his buckboard through the now drought-stricken country, Joseph feels that he may have been doing wrong without knowing it because 'there's an evil hanging over the land' (1933: 146). He hurries back home after collecting the fruit trees and, arriving in the dark, he immediately inspects the dry clods of earth and the leaves of a copse of oaks growing nearby –'enquiring with his fingers after the earth's health'. He comes to the conclusion that the earth is dry but alive, and at last satisfied, he reports to his oak tree: 'I was afraid Sir. Something in the air made me afraid' (1933: 147). As he strokes the bark, he suddenly feels cold and lonely and realises that his tree is dead:

The sense of loss staggered him, and all the sorrow he should have felt when his father died rolled in on him. The black mountains surrounded him, and the cold grey sky and the unfriendly stars shut him down, and the land stretched out from the center where he stood. It was all hostile, not ready to attack but aloof and silent and cold. Joseph sat at the foot of the tree, and not even the hard bark held any comfort for him. It was as hostile as the rest of the earth, as frigid and contemptuous as the corpse of a friend. 'Now what will I do?' he thought. 'Where will I go now?' A white meteor flared into the night air and burned up (1933: 147).

He confides in Elizabeth who tries to convince him that trees do not die so easily, but before dawn he slips out of bed to inspect his tree again. He digs a trench around the trunk and finds that the tree had been girdled under the ground-line. Thomas, who comes upon him, brutally laughs and says: 'Why, Burton girdled your tree. He's keeping the devil out'. Joseph suggests an application of tar to the exposed flesh of the tree, but Thomas assures him that it would do no good as '... the veins are cut. There's nothing to do ... except beat Hell out of Burton' (1933: 148). Joseph experiences a feeling of muffling calm and 'a blind inability to judge' when he realises that there is nothing to be done. He experiences his loss and loneliness as 'complete, a circle impenetrable', and tells Thomas that he has no punishments for Burton: 'He will punish himself'. He explains to Thomas that Burton wasn't sure that he was right when he decided to girdle the tree and, as it was not 'quite his nature to do this thing', he would suffer for it. This is another example of Joseph acting in accordance with his own nature and with non-teleological principles. Looking up at the pine grove on the ridge, he says to himself: 'I must go there soon. I'll be needing the sweetness and strength of that place' (1933: 148).

As the cold of late autumn descends on the valley, Joseph takes to walking in the brittle grass of the side-hills and inspecting the condition of the land while keeping an anxious eye on the fog clouds rolling in from the ocean without a promise of rain. In November he finds the springs dried up and his post-hole digger uncovers no trace of moisture in

the river beds. For the first time he knows that the dry years that he had been warned about had come. Illnesses begin to plague the people on the ranch while Joseph grows leaner, harder and increasingly restless. This is an allusion to Joseph's union with the earth: he changes, physically, as the earth responds to the drought. Alice leaves for Nuestra Señora to await Juanito's return, leaving Elizabeth to manage the household, the baby and her husband who is becoming more and more desperate as the rains stay away. To distract him, she suggests that they visit the pine grove together, but she also confesses that she has reasons of her own. She starts off by telling Joseph about her previous visit to the grove as a kind of joke, but then finds that the 'joke was forcing itself back upon her' (1933: 153). Joseph intently listens as she nervously tells him about her strange experience at the rock in the grove and about the reason why she wishes to visit the place again:

It was quiet Joseph, more quiet than anything I've ever known. I sat in front of the rock because that place seemed saturated with peace. It seemed to be giving me something I needed ... And I loved the rock ... more than you or the baby or myself ... The little stream was flowing out of me and I was the rock and the rock was ... the dearest thing in the world ... And then the feeling of the place changed ... Something evil came into it. ... I ran away ... I prayed a long time ... I want to go back, and see that it is just an old moss-covered rock in a clearing. Then I won't dream about it any more. Then it won't threaten me any more. I want to touch it. I want to insult it because it frightened me (1933: 152-53).

Elizabeth's desire to 'insult' the rock is contrary to her nature and an expression of revenge that can be equated to a form of teleological reasoning: the rock 'caused' her distress, therefore it should be 'punished'. Joseph contemplates telling her about what he had heard from Juanito concerning pregnant Indian women who 'went to sit in front of the rock, and about the old ones who lived in the forest'. He decides against it, however, because he feels that it might frighten her and that 'it is better that she should lose her fear of the place' (1933: 153). The implication seems to be that the Indians,

who 'belong' to the land, 'embrace' the rock as a kind of totem, whereas Elizabeth 'belongs' to the world of Monterey and has left her 'other self' behind at the mountain pass when she came to the valley of Nuestra Señora.

They decide to visit the grove the next day and Elizabeth excitedly plans to make a picnic out of the occasion – but she senses that Joseph is concealing something from her. This 'something' is his deeper understanding of the meaning of the rock, and his failure to act according to his first instincts and to share his knowledge with Elizabeth, especially in the light of their new-found closeness, has tragic consequences. Joseph, probably sensing that he is acting 'out of character' in deference to Elizabeth's fears, looks at his dead tree and says to himself: 'If only it were alive ... I would know what to do. I have no counsel any more' (1933: 154). As he walks to the barn to find Thomas, he imagines that he sees a pale ring around the moon, but it is so faint that he cannot be sure. The image of the moon cropping up at this stage, reminds one of Willie's prophetic dreams of the moon as a sterile, sinister and dangerous place, and the ring around it seems to accentuate the immanence of its appearance. Joseph doesn't find his brother in the barn but is comforted by the copious stock of hay that they had stored against the winter which is setting in.

Before sunup the next morning, Joseph prepares two horses for the ride to the grove. He grooms them until their coats shine like dull metal and he paints their hoofs black as he did when he took Elizabeth out for her first ride in the buggy when he was courting her. On their way they come across the carcass of a cow surrounded by buzzards and notice that the sage is dark, dry and leafless. They first ride out to the top of a peak from where the ocean can be seen through the pass of Puerto Suelo. Significantly, this name can loosely be translated as 'portals of the earth'. When they reach the peak, they look down upon a steel-grey, angry ocean with dark fog banks on the horizon. Elizabeth doesn't mind the gloomy view, however, because she hasn't seen the ocean for so long and has missed it. She seems to be gazing yearningly through the portals of a land to which she does not belong to the world of the sea which is her true home. She tells

Joseph about memories of the foghorn of the light house and the bell buoy off China Point that sometimes awaken her in the middle of the night and adds that these images and sounds must be deeply fixed in her subconscious mind: 'This valley traps me and I have the feeling that I can never escape from it and that I'll never really hear the waves again, nor the bell buoy, nor see the gulls sliding on the wind' (1933: 156). Joseph gently assures her that she can go back to visit at any time, but Elizabeth tells him that it would never be the same again: 'But it's a good full sadness, dear', she assures him, 'it's a luxurious sadness' (1933: 157).

Elizabeth insists on them having their picnic lunch out there on the peak, although it isn't even noon yet. She explains that she and her mother used to go up to Huckleberry Hill on picnics and that they sometimes started to eat their lunches before they even lost sight of their house. Her yearning for her childhood home is obvious and this indicates a certain alienation from the land where she finds herself – a condition which, metaphorically speaking, may be seen to be fateful in her case. Elizabeth also tells Joseph that there may be rain that evening, but he assures her that the clouds over the ocean are only fog clouds. The fey mood in which Elizabeth finds herself lends poignancy and a sense of prophecy to even her most innocent utterances at this stage in the novel and one is reminded of this later on in the narrative. Continuing in a nostalgic vein, Elizabeth tells Joseph about inconsequential memories of her childhood in Monterey that 'pop up in my mind suddenly, like ducks in a shooting gallery' (1933: 157). Joseph asks her whether she still wants to go to the pine grove and she assures him that she does: 'That's the main reason for the trip. I'm going to scotch the rock'. As she speaks, a hawk 'shot from the air with doubled fists. They heard the shock of flesh, and in a second the hawk flew up again, bearing a screaming rabbit in its claws'. Elizabeth's lip trembled: 'It's all right; I know it is. I hate to see it though', she tells her husband. Joseph remarks that the hawk missed its stroke: 'He should have broken its neck with the first blow, but he missed' (1933: 158). They watch as the hawk flies towards its nest in the pine grove, towards which they are headed. This is one of many scenes in the novel where nature foreshadows a coming event, as there are also

examples of echoes of past events reflected by nature in the present. The reader is, in fact, constantly challenged to adopt a 'Janus-like' attitude when reading Steinbeck as the interplay between nature and the past as well as future affairs of man is a favourite ploy in his novels. The 'foreshadowing' and 'echoing' role of nature in Steinbeck's works also reminds one of an aphorism of Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) as quoted in Richard Osborne's *Philosophy for Beginners*: 'The future influences the present as much as the past' (1992: 130).

When Joseph and Elizabeth come to the little stream issuing from the rock in the grove, they find that 'it isn't down a bit'. 'Does that make you feel better, Joseph?' Elizabeth asks her husband, and although he senses a little mockery in her words, he finds none in her face. He replies: 'It's as though the country were not dead while this stream is running. This is like a vein still pumping blood' (1933: 158). Elizabeth, once again, remarks that she wouldn't be surprised if it should soon rain again.

Speaking loudly to break the silence, she tells Joseph that it was only her 'condition' that made her afraid of the rock during her earlier visit. Looking into the cave in the rock, she comments: 'Nothing in there, just a deep hole in the rock, and the smell of wet ground'. She pats the shaggy sides of the rock and pulls out a handful of moss to show Joseph. 'I'll never dream of you again', she tells the rock. Joseph shivers and turns away, warning her that it is getting dark and time for them to go home. He strolls toward the path leading out of the grove, but Elizabeth calls back to him: 'You think I'm silly, don't you Joseph ... I'll climb up on its back and tame it' (1933: 159). Joseph warns her to be careful not to slip, but she digs her heels into the moss for a third step up the side of the rock. Suddenly the moss gives way beneath her and Joseph watches 'her head describe a little arc and strike the ground'. Her body shudders violently for a second, and then relaxes. Joseph stands over her for an instant before he runs toward the spring to scoop up water to revive her. But when he gets back to her, he sees the position of her neck and 'the grey stealing into her cheeks'. He mechanically picks up her hand filled with pine needles and feels for a pulse. 'I don't know what it is', he says

to himself. 'I should take her home ... It was too simple, too easy, too quick', he says aloud, and 'he knew that his mind could not grasp what had happened' (1933: 159-160). Joseph wants to make himself know what had happened because he can feel the beginning of calm acceptance settling upon him. He wants to cry out in personal pain before he is cut off and unable to experience sorrow or resentment. He tries to make himself realise that 'all the stories, all the incidents that made the life were stopped in a second – opinions stopped, and the ability to feel, all stopped without any meaning' (1933: 160). He says 'Good-bye, Elizabeth', and before the words are completely out, he finds himself cut off and aloof. He feels little stinging drops of cold on his forehead, and when he looks up he sees that it is raining gently. In the rain 'a vibration of life came into the place. Joseph lifted his head as though he were listening, and then he stroked the rock tenderly, saying: "Now you are two, and you are here. Now I will know where I must come to"' (1933: 160). The implication seems to be that the spirit of his father and, now, that of his wife, have entered the rock and the rock has now replaced the tree as the new totem, not only for Joseph, but for 'his' land and for those dependent upon it. The sacrifice of Elizabeth's life on the rock which she wanted to 'insult' seems to be 'inadequate' because the rain stops even before Joseph reaches the ranch with 'the loose bundle on the saddle in front of him' (1933: 161). He looks down upon the farm buildings below him and his mind goes back to a thing that Elizabeth said 'ages before': 'Homer is thought to have lived nine hundred years before Christ'. Joseph says it over and over again in his mind: 'before Christ, before Christ. Dear earth, dear land! Rama will be sorry. She can't know. The forces gather and center and become one and strong. Even I will join the center ... And he knew how he loved the rock and hated it' (1933: 161).

Thomas meets Joseph and takes the body from him. He silences Joseph when he tries to explain what happened and tells him to 'Go to Nuestra Señora and get drunk'. For the first time that Joseph can remember, he sees Thomas crying as he carries Elizabeth's body to his own house. Joseph almost runs to the dry river and up the stream bed to a deep, brown and ill-smelling pool of water where he watches big black eels moving

about in slow convulsions. As he sits by the pool 'the day ... passed before him, not as a day, but as an epoch. He remembered little gestures he had not known he saw. Elizabeth's words came back to him, so true in intonation ... that he thought he really heard them'. 'This is the storm', he says. 'This is the beginning of the thing I knew. There is some cycle here, steady and quick and unchangeable as a fly-wheel' (1933: 162). He imagines that if he sits and gazes at the pool and empties his mind of every cluttering picture, he may be able to come to know the cycle. He hears a sharp grunting sound coming from the bush adjacent to the river bed and suddenly five lean wild pigs led by a great tusked boar wade into the pool and start catching the eels and eating them alive before disappearing in the thickets again. Night has almost fallen before Joseph sees them wade back to the stagnant pool and drink once more. He sees a sudden flash of yellow light and one of the pigs fall screaming under the 'furious ray' of a mountain lion. The big leading boar charges at the lion which leaps out of its way. The boar snorts at its dead and then leads the remaining five back into the bush. 'If I could only shoot you', Joseph says aloud to the lion that glares at him, lashing its tail', here would be an end and a new beginning. But I have no gun. Go on with your dinner' (1933: 163). This thought is contrary to Joseph's nature and that of the land, but it can be interpreted as a reaction to the cruelty of the inexorable cycle that he is beginning to understand more fully. He thinks of how a new bond now ties him to the earth as he walks back home to the barn where Thomas is busy making a coffin. He reminds Thomas that when Benjy died they said that it takes graves to make a place one's own: 'That is a true thing. That makes us part of the place. There's some enormous truth in this' (1933: 164). He tells Burton not to put a fence around the grave: 'I want it to sink and be lost as soon as it can'. Now that Elizabeth is dead, Joseph seems to have no interest in the arrangements for her funeral.

The killings which Joseph had witnessed at the water hole echo the animal cannibalism which he came across when he first rode into the valley. The great boar which challenged the lion is probably the same 'father of fifty pigs ... and source of fifty more' that he saw eating its own offspring earlier on (1933: 13). According to William Simkins,

quoting Joseph Campbell, 'life lives on life' (1998:). The killings at the water hole may also supply a vital clue to the enigma of the 'cycle' that Joseph seeks to understand. Simkins, quoting Campbell again, states:

Without this continual sacrifice there would be no life whatsoever on this earth ... there is a renewing principle everywhere operative that is of the nature of the earth and of the mystery of the womb, which receives seed and returns it as renewed life ... The individual is thereby united with the way of nature, centred not in self-preservation but in accord with the wonder of the whole' (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>).

Joseph returns to his house where he ponders the thought that 'one cannot be dead until the things he changed are dead'. He looks at the clock, realising that it was wound by Elizabeth and still stores in its spring the energy of her hand. The woollen socks that she hung out to dry over the stove screen were still damp. These are vital parts of Elizabeth that are not dead yet and Joseph muses:

'[Man's] effect is the only evidence of his life. While there remains even a plaintive memory, a person cannot be cut off, dead. We kill a cow, and it is dead as soon as the meat is eaten, but a man's life dies as a commotion in a still pool dies, in little waves spreading and growing back toward stillness' (1933: 164).

Joseph leans back in his chair and falls into a state of semi-sleep during which his thoughts flow 'in tones, in currents of movement, in color, and in a slow plodding rhythm'. As he looks down upon his slouched body, at his curved arms and his hands resting in his lap, he dreamingly notices that proportions have changed:

A mountain range extended in a long curve and on its end were five little ranges, stretching out with narrow valleys between them. If one looked carefully, there seemed to be towns in the valleys. The long curved range was clad in black

sage, and the valleys ended on a flat of dark tillable earth, miles in length, which dropped off at last to an abyss. Good fields were there, and the houses and people were so small they could be seen only a little. High up on a tremendous peak, towering over the ranges and the valleys, the brain of the world was set, and the eyes that looked down on the earth's body. The brain could not understand the life of its body. It lay inert, knowing vaguely that it could shake off the life, the towns, the little houses of the fields with earthquake fury. But the brain was drowsed and the mountains lay still, and the fields were peaceful on their rounded cliff that went down to the abyss. And thus it stood a million years unchanging and quiet, and the world-brain sorrowed a little, for it knew that some time it would have to move, and then the valleys would crumble. The brain was sorry, but it could change nothing. It thought, 'I will endure even a little discomfort to preserve this order which has come to exist by accident. It will be a shame to destroy this order'. But the towering earth was tired of sitting in one position. It moved, suddenly, and the houses crumbled, the mountains heaved horribly, and all the work of a million years was lost (1933: 165).

As described in this excerpt, Joseph has become the 'inert' land itself as well as the 'world-brain' which looks dispassionately at the earth, although it 'sorrowed a little' at the thought that its movement would undo the order that has come to exist 'by accident' over a million years. Joseph has also, for the moment, become the embodiment of non-teleological man in full accord with nature. Although he senses the non-causality of life at key points throughout the novel, Simkins points out that Joseph, tragically, refuses to accept the drought as a non-teleological condition: 'For him the drought must have a metaphysical (or moral) cause which may then be corrected by metaphysical means' (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>). This aspect is dealt with in more detail hereunder.

Rama comes to see Joseph in order to find out how he is coping in this 'hard time' and remarks: 'There is no change. That makes me strong again. I was afraid there might

have been a break'. He tells her that he has been thinking '... of Elizabeth and of all the things that die. Everything seems to work with recurring rhythm except life. There is only one birth and only one death. Nothing else is like that'. In answer to Rama's question, he confirms that he loved Elizabeth, but Rama tells him that he didn't know her as a person: 'You have never known a person. You aren't aware of persons, Joseph; only people. You can't see units, Joseph, only the whole' (1933: 166). Joseph takes Rama's advice to 'go to bed and get some sleep if you can', but she soon returns to his room, naked, and tells him 'this is a need'. They copulate, almost ritually, and Rama tells Joseph 'It was a hunger in me, but a need to you. The long deep river of sorrow is diverted and sucked into me, and the sorrow which is only a warm wan pleasure is drawn out in a moment'. He tells her that 'the need was there' and before she leaves him, she confesses that 'It seems enough now, perhaps it is, but I am afraid it will bear litters of desires, and each one will grow larger than its mother'. She realises and accepts, however, that Joseph does not feel this way about her. Joseph asks her: 'Rama, what do you want from me?' and she replies, 'want nothing now. You are complete again. I wanted to be a part of you, and perhaps I am. But – I do not think so' (1933: 168).

The drought continues, unrelieved by the inch of rain that falls in February. The children play 'Aunt Elizabeth's funeral', burying a cartridge box over and over again as the weeks go by and the stock of hay in the barn dwindles. Rama cares for Joseph's baby and devotes more time to it than she did to her own. When Thomas sees that the cattle can find no more feed in the hills 'the terror of starvation began to arise in him'. Joseph goes to Nuestra Señora and speaks to the teamster Romas about buying hay. Romas assures him that 'in three months a bale of hay will be worth a cow', and he tells him that the drought has also hit the Salinas valley: 'We won't find grass this side of the San Joaquin river [over a hundred miles away]'. He reminds Joseph that he had told him about the recurring drought cycles and that Joseph would not believe him. He also tells him that he stands to lose all his cattle if he decides to drive them to the San Joaquin

river valley. In parting, Romas tells Joseph that his son Willie had committed suicide by hanging himself.

Joseph is met at the ranch by Thomas who tells him that he had found ten dead cows. Joseph thinks to himself, 'I'm failing to protect the land, the duty of keeping life in my land is beyond my power' (1933: 173). He tells Thomas to see to it that the cattle are fattened up for the trek to San Joaquin and the two men decide to visit the coast across the mountain range while the cattle are being prepared for the journey. They start out on their journey during the night and on two occasions they distinctly hear the sound of something that sounds like a sheep bell. Thomas says that he had heard it near his home before but thought that he was dreaming. As they emerge from a pass of shattered granite, they suddenly look down 'on a new fresh world' with giant redwood trees, tangles of berry vines and sword ferns as tall as a man. Quail, rabbits and deer are plentiful, but they realise that they will not be able to bring the cattle there as 'there isn't a flat place for a cow to stand'. They realise that the verdancy of the place is due to the fog that settles in the creases of the of the mountains during the night and 'in the daytime goes back to the sea'. Joseph compares it with the drought in their valley and says that he 'resents this place' (1933: 176).

They walk down the steep slope towards the sea and come across an old man with a burro which wears a real silver bell which they had heard ringing before. Joseph starts to tell the old man that he had seen him before, but then stops in embarrassment because he realises that he had never really seen him before at all. The feeling of *déjà vu* which Joseph experiences in meeting the old man, and the fact that Thomas seems to have heard the sound of the silver bell before, possibly in 'a dream', strengthens the aura of mysticism that surrounds the old hermit and the shaman-like role that he plays as described below. The old man tells them that he lives on a cliff some five-hundred feet above the sea and that they are to stay with him. He 'confides' in them that he is 'the last man in the western world to see the sun'. 'After it is gone to everyone else, I see it for a little while. I've seen it for the last twenty years ... except when the fog was in

or the rain was falling'. He anxiously looks at the sky and tells them that it is time to be going. The old man starts off at a half run down the trail and Thomas tells Joseph that he is crazy. Joseph, realising that Thomas has 'the animal's fear of insanity', tells him that the old man is not violently crazy and that he wants to go with him. Thomas agrees on condition that he can take his blankets 'off into the bush'. The old man lives in a pole cabin and has a little shed, a pig pen with wild pigs, a vegetable garden and a patch of corn. He shows them his traps used for trapping pigs, rabbits, quail, thrushes and squirrels. He explains that he keeps the animals until he needs them. Thomas announces that he is going on a walk to the ocean, and the old man asks Joseph why Thomas hates him. Joseph explains that Thomas puts himself in the place of the trapped beasts, and can feel how afraid they are. 'He doesn't like fear. He catches it too easily'. The old man is sad and tells Joseph that he is gentle with the creatures: 'I don't let them be afraid. When I kill them they never know. You shall see' (1933: 177-179).

Joseph notices three little crosses stuck in the ground close to the cliff's edge and the old man explains that they mark the graves of three drowned men who washed up on the beach: 'Two were dark men, and one was light. The light man wore a saint's medallion on a string around his neck' (1933: 179). Joseph tells him that he 'likes' the crosses and that it was 'a good thing to do'. The old man assures him that he will also like the 'sunset place' and proceeds to show him a little platform built on the cliff's edge, with a wooden railing in front and a wooden bench. In front of the bench there is a large stone slab, scoured and clean, resting on four blocks of wood. The old man points to a rim of black fog on the horizon and tells Joseph that it 'will be a good one ... It'll be a red one in the fog. This is a good night for the pig' (1933: 180). The old man fetches a pig which he had trussed up and lays it down on the slab, stroking it until it grunts contentedly. He explains that 'it must not cry. It doesn't know'. As the sun bathes the sea in crimson light, the old man cuts the pig's throat, saying: 'Don't cry little brother ... If I have done it right, you will be dead when the sun is dead'. He explains to Joseph that he kills some animal every night and Joseph says to himself: 'What has this man found? Out of his experience he has picked out the thing that makes him happy ... This man

has discovered a secret, he must tell me if he can' (1933: 181). The old man tells Joseph that he, Joseph, is too wise to think that he is crazy to do what he is doing, but that he himself doesn't know the real reasons: 'I have made up reasons, but they aren't true. I have said to myself, "The sun is life. I give life to life – I make a symbol of the sun's death". When I made these reasons I knew they weren't true'. Joseph remarks: 'These were words to clothe a naked thing, and the thing is ridiculous in clothes'. The old man agrees and then says: 'I do it because I like to'. Joseph nods eagerly and adds: 'You would be uneasy if it were not done. You would feel that something was left unfinished'. The old man is happy to have found an understanding listener, and continues: 'I can't tell that it does not help the sun. But it is for me. In the moment, I am the sun. Do you see? I, through the beast am the sun. I burn in the death ... Now you know'. Joseph replies: 'I know now. I know for you. For me there is a difference that I don't dare think about yet, but I will think about it'. 'Some time it will be perfect', the old man continues, 'the sky will be right. The sea will be right. My life will tell me when it is time. Then will be the perfect time, and it will be the last ... When it comes, I, myself will go over the edge of the world with the sun ... In every man this thing is hidden. It tries to get out, but a man's fears distort it ... What gets out is changed – blood on the hands of a statue, emotion over the story of an ancient torture – the giving or drawing of blood in copulation. Why ... I've told the creatures in the cages how it is. They are not afraid. Do you think I am crazy?' Joseph smilingly agrees that the old man may indeed be crazy, but adds: 'Thomas says you are. Burton would say you are. It is not thought safe to open a clear path to your soul for the free, undistorted passage of the things that are there. You do well to preach to the beasts in the cage, else you might be in a cage yourself (1933: 182-83).

According to Simkins, Joseph misinterprets the ritual sacrifices to the setting sun made by the old man:

Pacific mist almost perpetually bathes the old man's home and so his sacrifice of small animals has no more to do with bringing moisture to his small crops than

with bringing the sun back every day. Joseph Wayne does not understand that the old man's rituals are not about the cosmic order of the universe, but rather, they involve his own understanding of himself and his relation to an otherwise implacable universe (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>).

Simkins postulates that Joseph almost habitually misinterprets events because he thinks causally. There are moments when he acts in accordance with non-teleological principles, as pointed out in previous pages of this dissertation, but when the drought comes and the ranch fails, 'he assumes some violation on his part and he desperately seeks some ritual propitiation to reverse this fate' (Simkins, 1998: <http://ocean.st.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>). This as well as other aspects of teleological thinking are discussed more fully hereunder.

Thomas returns from the beach and Joseph persuades him with great difficulty to join the old man and himself in dinner, which consists of the sacrificed pig. The brothers take their blankets out on the cliff to sleep and Joseph tells Thomas that he must take the cattle out to San Joaquin and that he, Joseph, will stay behind at the ranch: 'I've put my mind to the act of going, and I can't. Why, it'd be like leaving a sick person'. Thomas sarcastically retorts that it would be more like leaving a dead body, but Joseph protests that the rains are bound to come during the next winter, the grass will be up in spring and the rivers will be flowing again: 'This is my land. I don't know why it's mine, but I cannot leave it' (1933: 185). Early the next morning the men take leave of the old hermit who is sad that Joseph will not stay to share his 'knowledge'. Joseph bitterly remarks: 'I have none to give you. My knowledge has failed' (1933: 186).

Before descending via the mountain pass towards their ranch which they can see in the distance, they look back longingly at the green world that they are leaving behind and Thomas remarks, 'if there were only feed for the cattle I would move over'. Joseph replies: 'It isn't ours Thomas, it's like a beautiful woman, and she isn't ours ... The old man knew a secret Tom. He told me some straight clean things'. Thomas, however,

insists that the old man is crazy and Joseph finds it impossible to defend the old man's behaviour. However, when he tells Thomas that the old man traps the animals because it isn't easy to shoot game for food on the mountainside, Thomas is satisfied: 'But that's all right ... I thought there was something else ... His craziness hasn't anything to do with the animals and birds then'. He admits that he is afraid of every kind of ritual because 'it is a kind of little trap'. Joseph agrees: 'Perhaps it is. I hadn't thought of it' (1933: 187-88). When they reach their ranch, they come upon more carcasses of cattle and Thomas rides off to prepare for the trek which he now plans to start the next day because he cannot stand the sight of 'the acre of bones'. Joseph's heart is filled with defeat and he says to himself: 'Something has failed. I was appointed to take care of the land, and I have failed'. He remembers the rock in the grove with a feeling of excitement and convinces himself that if the stream from the rock still flows the land cannot be dead. When he gets to the yard he finds everyone busy packing and getting ready to move to San Joaquin. Rama tries to persuade Joseph to go along with them, but when she sees that he will not change his mind, she asks him to let her have his child to keep as her own. Joseph thinks about the old man and of his sacrifice and asks her why she wants the baby. Rama says, 'because he is part of you'. He asks her whether she loves him, and she assures him that she is near to hating him. 'Then take the child', he tells her. The implication seems to be that giving the child to someone who loves him would not be a 'proper sacrifice'. Rama wants to know whether he will not change his mind, but Joseph assures her that the baby is hers to keep. He points to the dead tree and tells her that to him it was the centre of the land, a kind of father of the land: ' ... and Burton killed it ... There's a circle in the grove, and a great rock in the circle. The rock killed Elizabeth ... and on the hill over there are the graves of Benjy and Elizabeth ... The land is not dead, but is sinking under a force too strong for it ... It may help, to give the child to you'. Rama tells him that if he is prepared to give his child away as a kind of sacrifice, she is afraid of him and glad to be going away. Joseph looks at the pine grove and says to himself, 'now we are alone; we will be working together' (1933: 190-91).

Joseph bids farewell to Thomas and Rama before dawn the next morning and also sees the drovers off on their way. He is filled with sorrow at the emptiness around him:

He turned away at last to the dead houses, the dead barn and the great dead tree. It was quieter than anything should be. The barn door swung open on its hinges. Rama's house was open too. ... When he locked the door of Rama's house he felt a guilt as one feels when the lid of a coffin is closed for the last time, and the body is deserted and left alone (1933:193).

Joseph goes back to his own house, tidies it up and brings in wood for the night's cooking. He then sits forlornly on his front porch and watches birds pecking at grain that he had scattered for them. He sees a squirrel trotting fearlessly across the yard 'led on by the news that the ranch was deserted'. Suddenly 'a brown weasel ran at him and missed, and the two rolled about in the dust. A horned toad came out of the dust and waddled to the bottom step of the porch, and settled to catch flies' (1933: 194). Vignettes of nature such as these are also favourite Steinbeck devices. As pointed out before, they often foreshadow or echo events in the narrative. Here the predatory aspect of nature is accentuated and the scene also reveals how quickly nature moves in to reclaim an abandoned 'civilisation' such as the deserted ranch. Unable to stand the quiet around him, Joseph starts out on a long walk to the pine grove. He finds a trickle of water in the gulch where the grove stream used to flow strongly and digs a hole from which he drinks as soon as the water had cleared. In the grove he finds that the thick moss on the rock had turned yellow and brittle and that the ferns around the cave had wilted. He pulls out a handful of moss and is relieved to see that it is not dead yet. He digs a deep hole in the stream bed and uses his hat to carry water to pour on the dying moss on the rock. He takes care to water the scars on the moss caused by Elizabeth when she tried to climb the rock. As he works he feels that the rock is no longer 'a thing separated from him. He had no more feeling of affection for it than he had for his own body. He protected it against death as he would have saved his own life'. He says to himself: 'Here is the seed that will stay alive until the rain comes again. This is the heart

of the land, and the heart is still beating'. The implication seems to be that the rock is no longer a totem separate from Joseph, but that the two have merged to become a single entity, 'the seed' that must stay alive to germinate when the rain comes again. Joseph feels that he has come in time to save the land and he tells the rock: 'We will wait here, barricaded against the drought' (1933: 195-96). He falls asleep beside the rock and when he wakes up in the middle of the night, he knows that he now belongs there. He returns to his home to collect provisions and blankets, saddles his horse and immediately returns to the grove to stay.

Joseph's life now centres on the rock and after months of watering, the moss grows sleek, thick and green again: 'In the whole land there was no other green thing'. Every two weeks he rides to Nuestra Señora for supplies, and one day he receives a letter from Thomas which tells him that they had lost three hundred head of cattle on the way but that the remaining cattle are fat. Thomas complains about the pasture rent which is too high and adds that the rest of the family members are well. Joseph finds Romas in town and the latter tells him about the ordeal of the long trek. Back at the grove, Joseph sees the shrubs and vines surrounding the clearing dry up and die as the days go by', but the pine roots pierced to bedrock and still drank a little water, and the needles were still black-green' (1933: 198-99).

For the first time, Joseph starts setting up markers to monitor the water level in the stream. In December the 'black frost' strikes the country and Joseph goes down to the houses to fetch a tent to sleep in. He tries to start up the windmill again but there is no water in the well for it to pump. He avoids the graves on his way back to the grove and contemplates visiting the old man, but 'he knew he couldn't leave the rock, for the moss would wilt'. At the rock he finds that the stream had receded from his marking pegs a good two inches and for the first time 'a panic fell upon him'. He imagines hearing the drought 'creeping, slipping on dry scales over the ground, circling and exploring the edges of the grove ... and the dry frightened whisper of the earth as the drought passed over it' (1933: 200-201).

As Joseph sits by the fire which he made in order to light up the tiny stream from which he collects bucketsful of water to keep the moss wet, he hears the sound of an approaching horse and he imagines that it is the drought, which has now taken on an animal form in his feverish mind, coming up the hill to claim his grove. Juanito rides into the glade and tells Joseph that he knew where to find him now that 'the thing that made me go ... [is] ... gone'. He tells Joseph about his son, whom his father-in-law has nicknamed Chango and little piojo (louse). Joseph seems to see a pale blue light framing Juanito's head. Juanito, looking closely at Joseph tells him that he looks dry and feverish, and should see a doctor. Joseph protests that he is well, but that the land is sick: 'Only this rock and I remain. I am the land ... Elizabeth told me once of a man who ran away from the old Fates. He clung to an altar where he was safe'. Joseph smiles in recollection and continues: 'Elizabeth had stories for everything that happened, stories that ran alongside things that happened and pointed the way they'd end' (1933: 202-203). On a certain level, Joseph misinterprets the legend of Orestes when he seemingly assumes that the Furies triumphed over him. Elizabeth didn't quite finish her story when she told him that 'the Furies sat waiting for him to get hungry and lose his hold [on the tripod]' (1933: 129). Instead, Orestes was tried (on charges of murdering his adulterous mother Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus, who had helped her to murder his father, Agamemnon) and acquitted by the prime council, the Areopagus. He was reunited with his sister, Iphigenia and lived to complete his purification by taking the image of Artemis (goddess of the hunt, but also 'associated with chastity, marriage, children, wildlife, and, as a complement to the sun god Apollo, with the moon') from Taurus to Greece (1994: *The Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, Third Edition, Columbia University Press). Elizabeth's role as 'oracle' is discussed more fully below.

Juanito tells Joseph about Willie whom he took to a place with big trees near Santa Cruz and where Willie was happy, herding cattle. When Willie had his nightmares, Juanito took him to Santa Cruz to drink whiskey and to see a girl. One night he took him to an amusement park where Willie looked at the moon through a telescope: 'It had

been all right when he thought it was a dream, but when he saw the place was really there, and not a dream, he couldn't stand to live. Those holes, señor, and that dry dead place. It was really there ... I found him hanging in the morning' (1933: 203-204). Juanito's story clearly disturbs Joseph who 'jerked upright' and then tells Juanito to make up the fire. Joseph reassures Juanito that 'the old thing' (Benjy's death) has 'gone' from him but he declines Juanito's request to leave the country with him:

There is only the rock and the stream. I know how it will be. The stream is going down. In a little while it will be gone and the moss will turn yellow, and then it will turn brown, and it will crumble in your hand. Then only I will be left. And I will stay ... I will stay until I am dead. And when that happens, nothing will be left (1933: 204).

Juanito offers to stay with him but Joseph tells him that he doesn't want him to do so because 'that will make too much time to wait ... there would be a thousand other intervals to stretch out the time ..'. In reply to Joseph's question, Juanito tells him that Christmas is past and that it will be the New Year in two days time. Juanito remarks that he did not see clouds on his way but, at least', he moon has no fringe'. He suggests that Joseph should see the priest because 'he is a wise man and a priest'. He adds that Father Angelo had told him that Joseph was a wise man too and, one day, would 'come knocking at [his] door' because 'in his wisdom he will need strength'. Joseph asks him why his own people who know about their ancestors and the importance that the grove held for them, did not come to visit it when the drought started. Juanito tells him that 'the old ones are dead and the young ones have forgotten'. Joseph suddenly notices that the level of the water in the stream has risen, and he excitedly tells Juanito that his coming had brought the good fortune. Juanito remarks that 'the moon is down' (incidentally, the title of a book that Steinbeck would write in 1942) and promises Joseph that he will continue to water the moss on the rock throughout the night if Joseph will only go to sleep. The moon assumes a sinister role in the novel and when it is 'down' the flow of the stream increases and Joseph has some respite in sleep. For the first time

in many days he falls into an unbroken and deep sleep. Juanito studies the sleeping figure and sees how gaunt Joseph has become and that his hair is turning grey. He thinks about stories that his mother had told him of the great misty spirit and the games that he played on man and on other gods, and he also thinks about the statues of Joseph and Mary in the old church of Nuestra Señora. He remembers that there were sometimes bird droppings on the blue mantle of Our Lady and on Saint Joseph's head. The reference to the desecration of the statues reduces the saintly status of Joseph and Mary to that of common people who are subject to the vicissitudes of life. The reason for this thought comes to him as he looks at Joseph and notices his resemblance with the face of the crucified Christ hanging on His cross in the church. He sees the same disappointment and weariness in the face, but when he builds up the fire to see more clearly, he notices that even in sleep Joseph's jaw is 'resistingly' set. He crosses himself and as he pulls up the covers around the sleeping man he feels that he loves him 'achingly' (1933: 206-208). Juanito is obviously a candidate for discipleship as shown by his worship of the Jesus-like character depicted in Joseph.

In the morning when Joseph awakens, he is elated to see that the stream has grown even stronger and he tells Juanito that there is now no need to see the priest. He explains that he cannot confess because he doesn't belong to the priest's church. Juanito shrewdly tells Joseph that 'before a spring goes dry it grows a little' and that 'unless God interferes, the spring will stop' (1933: 209). Joseph finally agrees to visit the priest and when the two men arrive at the church, Joseph tells Juanito that he must not go back to the grove with him because he wants to be alone. Father Angelo welcomes Joseph and shrewdly asks him whether his tree has failed him. Joseph is surprised at his insight and Father Angelo smiles and tells him that he is priest enough to recognise a priest. Joseph sullenly tells him that his brother had killed the tree and Father Angelo remarks that it was a bad and stupid thing to do because 'it may have made the tree more strong'. Joseph denies that he has 'come to the Church at last' and tells Father Angelo that he only wants him to pray for rain because the land is dying. Father Angelo sharply replies that the land does not die but that he will help Joseph to pray for his soul:

'We have held mass. The rain will come. God brings the rain and withholds it of his knowledge'. Joseph angrily tells the priest that the deserts were also once alive: 'Because a man is sick often, and each time gets well, is that proof that he will never die?' he asks Father Angelo. The priest replies that 'the principal business of God has to do with men and their progress toward heaven, and their punishment in Hell' (1933: 211-212). In leaving, Joseph tells Father Angelo that he will go back to the rock and wait. The priest tells him that he will pray for his soul: 'There's too much pain in you'. He looks up to one of his pictures of the descent from the cross and says to himself: 'Thank God that this man has no message. Thank God that he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in ... else there might be a new Christ here in the West' (1933: 212). He then prays for Joseph's soul, asks forgiveness for his own heresy, and prays that the rain will come quickly to save the dying land.

As Joseph rides down the streets of Nuestra Señora on his way back to the grove, he is confronted by Juanito, who this time persuades him to at least have a drink with him in the saloon before going. They are the only customers, and the bartender tells them that half of the people have left the town because of the drought and that he would 'set out a barrel of whiskey in the road, free, if the rain would come tomorrow' (1933: 214). Juanito persuades Joseph to join him and Alice in dinner at their house, and Joseph agrees to go. Alice shows him her baby and Joseph remarks that he is 'strong and handsome ... I am glad of that'. She tells him that the child was named after him and asks Joseph to bless the child. He kisses the baby's forehead and says: 'Grow strong, grow big and strong' (1933: 215). Joseph gets ready to leave and Juanito, once again, tells him that he wants to go with him to the grove because he is 'afraid' to see him go alone. Joseph remarks that there is no reason to be afraid because the moon is coming up. Juanito excitedly cries out that there is a ring around the moon, but Joseph assures him that 'in a dry year all signs fail'. Joseph rides away while 'a cold stony moon rose high and followed him'. He sees the unusual sight of a faint flicker of aurora borealis, 'rarely seen so far south' and as he rides on the wind begins to blow, acrid with dust. Nature, once again, signals the coming of a portentous event. The illuminations of the night sky – a

threatening moon (already dealt with) and now an unusual display of the northern lights in the far-off south – are ominous in themselves, but, as with Benjy's death, the wind starts to blow from the mountains on the west just as Joseph says to himself: 'Some change is beginning. It will not be long before some new thing is on its way' (1933: 217). Steinbeck made a careful study of Jung, who was in turn familiar with *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes* – an ancient Chinese book of prophecy and wisdom: 'Its earliest parts are thought to date from the century before Confucius and it consists of eight trigrams, corresponding to the powers of nature. They are used to interpret the future with the textual help of supplementary definitions, intuitions, and Confucian commentary' (1994: *The Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*: <http://www.encyclopedia.com>). As quoted in van der Post's *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, the symbol Ku is: 'The wind blows low on the mountains; the image of decay'. It can also be interpreted as 'the need to work on what has been spoilt' (1976: 266). The meaning of these portents become apparent later on in the narrative and are dealt with more fully in the following chapter.

Joseph rides on in a night that has 'the quality of memory' and as he thinks of how his father had given him the blessing, he wishes that he had given the same blessing to his namesake. He remembers a time when 'the land was drenched with his father's spirit so every rock and bush was close and dear. He remembered how damp earth felt and smelled, and how the grass roots wove a fabric just under the surface' (1933: 216-217). He hears coyotes giggling and shrieking and comes across a dead cow with a skinny calf butting frantically at her udder for milk. Joseph trusses up the calf and takes it on the horse with him to save it from the coyotes. He calls out to them: 'Now come for your dinner. Eat the cow. Pretty soon there will be no more to eat'. Looking at the 'bone-white moon, sailing and hovering in the blown dust', he says to himself, 'in a little while it will fly down and eat the world' (1933: 217).

When Joseph reaches the grove where there is at least respite from the howling wind, he finds that the stream has stopped flowing from the rock. In the dawn light he sees

that the moss has already become brittle. A blinding shaft of light suddenly cuts through the pine trunks and Joseph becomes aware of the trussed calf struggling behind him. Suddenly Joseph thinks of the old man on the cliff-top and with shining eyes he says to himself: 'This might be the way'. He carries the calf to the stream bed and slits its throat, watching the blood run down the gravelled runnel into the bucket. There is barely enough blood to redden the gravel and as Joseph sits beside the dead calf, he thinks of the old man and says: 'His secret was for him, it won't work for me' (1933: 218-219).

As he watches the dying moss he thinks to himself: 'This is gone now. I am all alone'. He experiences a sudden attack of panic and decides that he will go to the green canyon over the Puerto Suelo now that he is no longer supported by the rock and the stream. He runs towards his tethered horse carrying his saddle, and as he lifts the heavy saddle onto the horse's back, the tapadero struck the horse's side. The saddle is flung back on Joseph's chest as the horse rears up and gallops out of the glade and away. Joseph bleeds from a cut on his wrist made by the saddle buckle. He decides to climb up on the rock to sleep a while: 'The calm grew more secure about him, and the aloofness cut him off from the grove and from all the world'. He rests for a few minutes in the deep, soft moss on top of the rock and then takes out his pocket knife and gently opens the vessels in his already bleeding wrist. He watches as the bright blood cascades over the moss and hears the shouting of the wind around the grove. The sky grows grey and after a time Joseph grows grey as well. He looks down at the long mountain range of his body which 'grew huge and light. It arose into the sky, and out of it came the streaking rain.'

'I should have known', he whispered. 'I am the rain'. And yet he looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss. He felt the driving rain, and heard it whipping down, pattering on the ground. He saw his hills grow dark with moisture. Then a lancing pain shot through the heart of the world. 'I am the land', he said, 'and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little

while'.... And the storm thickened, and covered the world with darkness, and the rush of waters (1933: 220).

The rain comes down in torrents on New Year's Day, boiling down the hillsides and filling the river of Our Lady which churns among the boulders and races for the pass in the hills. At his little house Father Angelo sits among his parchment books and holy pictures reading *La Vida del San Bartolomeo*. He puts his book aside when the rain starts and feels glad when he remembers that he had prayed for it. At dusk of the second night the storm is still raging unabated and after Father Angelo replaces the candles before the Virgin, he stands in the dark doorway of his church and sees Manuel Gomez hurry past carrying a wet coyote pelt. Soon afterwards Joe Alvarez trots by with a deer's horns in his hands and Mrs. Guitierrez follows through the puddles with a moth-eaten bear skin in her arms. 'Only let them start it, and I'll stop them', Father Angelo says to himself. He coats a large crucifix with phosphorous so that it may be better seen in the dark, and then sits down and waits for the expected sounds. Soon the throb of the bass strings of the guitars are heard, and then the low chanting of many voices, growing shrill and hysterical. Father Angelo knows that they are now wearing animal skins without knowing why they wore them. He also knows that the people will soon be taking off their clothes and 'they'll roll in the mud. They'll be rutting like pigs in the mud'. He dons his heavy cloak, takes up the crucifix and opens the door. 'The rain was roaring on the ground, and in the distance, the river crashed on its stones. The guitars had become a bestial snarling. Father Angelo thought he could hear the bodies splashing in the mud'. He closed the door again: 'I couldn't see them in the dark', he says. 'They'll all get away in the dark'. And then he confesses to himself: 'They wanted the rain so, poor children. I'll preach against them on Sunday. I'll give everybody a little penance' (1933: 221-222).

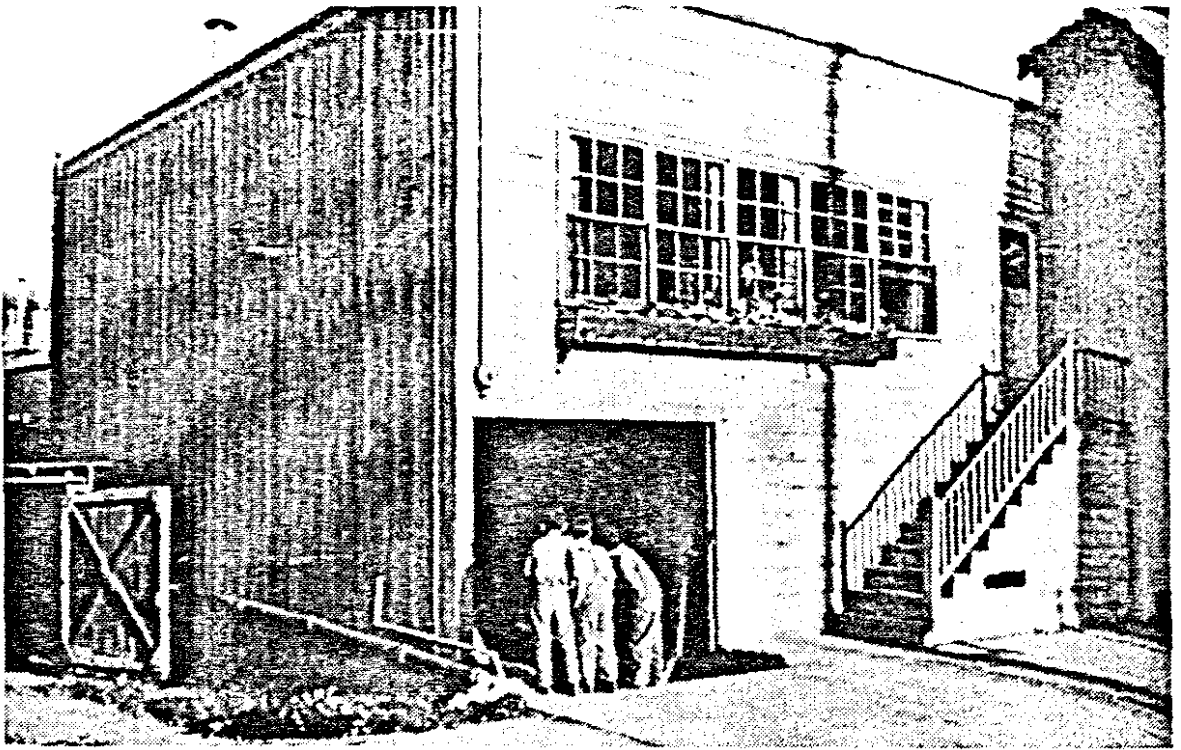
The mixed breed of paisanos, offspring of the 'heathen savages and Spaniards', and possibly also of the 'saints' and 'bad men' mentioned earlier in this chapter by Berthon and Robinson (1991: 156), revert to their ancient customs in celebrating the primeval

advent of the resurrection of the 'dead' land, although they 'don't know why they do it', in the words of Father Angelo (1933: 221-22). They find that forces within themselves resonate with the collective unconscious that Jung speaks about. They don animal skins and antlers and dance under the spell of ancient rhythms given new forms by new instruments such as the guitar. The 'medicinal' hallucinogens which their ancestors used are replaced by alcohol, but the combined effect of the aforementioned elements upon them induces the same responses: they become a single animal moving with phalanx-like purpose and they lose all inhibitions imposed upon them by the 'new order' of the Church. Father Angelo, being a wise man, understands the instincts of his 'poor children' and knows that the 'new order' in the form of the Catholic Church, can only succeed by being lenient and by 'absorbing' some of the less offensive customs of heathendom into the culture of the church – as, for example, ancient pagan practices evolved to become the Christmas that we know today, as 'Christianised' by the Church in Europe in earlier times. On the surface, the paisanos have responded to the so-called civilising influences carried into their country by the 'westerling' movement, as well as to the ameliorating effect brought about by mixed marriages. A 'raw' display of forces in nature, such as a life-giving cloudburst after a prolonged drought, however, brings forth the repressed and/or forgotten content of their mental and material selves: the Jungian collective unconscious.

Joseph Wayne is a much more complex character that is dealt with extensively in chapter six. In brief, he has absorbed into his 'religion' pantheistic and Dionysiac elements, with overtones of Vedanta and Nirvana, according to Fontenrose (1963: 19). On the other hand, Simkins sees him as a teleological man with mystic sensibilities who searches vainly to fulfil his potential because he realises too late the unity of existence and its non-teleological nature (1998: <http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth/5.html>).

Father Angelo, as he sits in his chair listening to the rush of waters is, once again, pleased that he had prayed for the rain:

He thought of Joseph Wayne, and he saw the pale eyes suffering because of the land's want. 'That man must be very happy now', Father Angelo said to himself (1933: 222).



Children at entrance to Ed Ricketts's lab, 1941 (Courtesy Peter Stackpole)

Ed Ricketts in lab with ray, Ritchie Lovejoy pointing over his shoulder, preparing illustration for *Between Pacific Tides* (The John Steinbeck Collection, Stanford University Libraries)



Natalya "Tal" Lovejoy (in lampshade) at costume party. (Photo by Ritchie Lovejoy, courtesy, © 1983 Jennifer Lovejoy Kelly)



CHAPTER SIX

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF STEINBECK'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AS EXPRESSED IN THE ROLE OF THE PROTAGONIST IN THE NARRATIVE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NON-TELEOLOGICAL THINKING, RELIGION, AND ALLEGORY/MYTH

This story has grown since I started it. From a novel about people, it has become a novel about the world. And you must never tell it. Let it be found out. The new eye is being opened here in the west – the new seeing. It is probable that no one will know it for two hundred years. It will be confused, analyzed, analogized, criticized, and none of our fine critics will know what is happening ... There are things in my mind as strong as pure as good as anything in the structure of literature. If I do not put them down, it will be because I have not the technique. The story is too big, Duke. I am so afraid of it sometimes ... Joseph is a giant shouldering his way among the ages, pushing the stars aside to make a passage to god. And this god – that is the thing. When god is reached – will anybody believe it. It doesn't really matter. I believe it and Joseph believes it. The story is a parable, Duke. The story of a race, growth and death. Each figure is a population, and the stones, the trees, the muscled mountains are the world – but not the world apart from man – the world and man – the one inseparable unit man plus his environment.

Steinbeck, as quoted in his hand-written journal of To a God Unknown, which was dedicated to his friend, 'Dook' Sheffield (Benson, 1984: 260).

In this chapter I shall attempt (in Steinbeck's words, as quoted above) to 'tell' at least part of 'the story' of *To a God Unknown* that he wanted to be 'found out' by future readers. The part to be focused upon mainly concerns his principal character, Joseph, in the context of the three elements mentioned at the beginning of this thesis – and considered by various scholars to be intrinsic to the author's fiction – namely, non-teleological thinking, religion, and allegory/myth. These elements shall also be explored

in relation to other characters in the novel that have a direct influence upon the protagonist's development and actions. Such an exploration, however, cannot be complete without first taking cognisance of the early philosophical, mythological, religious, psychological and other related influences that played a role in shaping the author's thinking at the time. Benson states in his 1984 biography of the author, that although Steinbeck was almost alone in his generation of important fiction writers to have a formal interest in philosophy, his reading in this field was a private matter: 'as a result, this too becomes part of the secret, and we have only a very sketchy notion of what he read and how this thought evolved' (1984: 233). Fortunately, Benson provides a wealth of information about Steinbeck's formal as well as informal education which, together with other sources, such as his letters published in 1975, reveal a great deal about his thinking. For instance, evidence of Steinbeck's early interest in the Jungian approach to psychology has already surfaced in the previous chapter of this dissertation and is supported by Benson, who states that 'it was indeed Jung that captured Steinbeck's interest, not Freud (whose theories, Carol recalls, he tended to reject). Aspects of Jungian Theory, particularly the collective unconscious, found fertile soil in Steinbeck's early interests in myth and evolutionary biology' (1984: 207). Such influences and their impact on his work, and particularly on *To a God Unknown*, are briefly explored hereunder in order to cast light upon the protagonist of the novel and upon the nature of the forces that (through Steinbeck) inspired him.

Although Benson, as mentioned before, traces the main influence on Steinbeck's thought to the ancient Greek world view and concept of nature, Peter Lisca (in his second book on Steinbeck entitled *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth*, which appeared in 1978) points out the strong influence of Eastern philosophy, and especially Lao Tze's *Tao Teh Ching*, on *Cannery Row* (1945). In recent times this view (of Oriental influence on Steinbeck's thinking) has been extended by especially Steinbeck scholars in the East, to include at least *Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941), as well as much of his post-

World War II fiction and non-fiction. An example of this view can be found on the Internet World Wide Web pages (Web master: Andrew Chung) in the form of an essay entitled 'Living In(ten)tionally: Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez* as a Reflection of the Balance Advocated in Lao Tze's *Tao Teh Ching*', by Dr. Michael Meyer, under the auspices of the Hong Kong International School's (HKIS) Web Team, and which was posted on 8 September 1997 (webmaster@www.hkis.edu.hk). This essay traces Lao Tze's influence on *Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941) and notes Lisca's belief that Steinbeck was familiar with Lao's teachings, especially in the light of the fact that two important editions of the text of the *Tao* (by Lin Yutang in 1942, and Witter Bynner in 1944) had appeared just before the publication of *Cannery Row* in 1945. Lisca supports his argument that 'many basic principles of the Tao are generally visible throughout Steinbeck's post-war novel' by supplying textual evidence from *Cannery Row* as well as from the letters and unpublished papers of Ed Ricketts. According to Meyer's (HKIS) essay, Steinbeck's even earlier acquaintance with Oriental influence is supported by evidence provided in Robert DeMott's 1984 publication entitled *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed*. In this meticulously annotated bibliographical guide to books known to have been read by Steinbeck, and including remarks that he had made regarding particular texts and books, it becomes clear that Steinbeck had access to Lao Tze's *Tao Teh Ching* in Ricketts' library. It is furthermore argued by Meyer that, 'since Steinbeck later re-wrote Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* in *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, it is not far-fetched to believe that he also found an opportunity to re-write Lao Tze's great masterwork, incorporating it not only into *Cannery Row*, but into much of his later fiction and non-fiction as well' (webmaster@www.hkis.edu.hk).

It should be noted that Steinbeck was still working on *To a God Unknown* when he met Ricketts, as well as the mythologist Joseph Campbell (in 1930 and 1932, respectively). Ideas garnered from the *Tao* as well as from discussions with Campbell, are almost

certainly reflected in the final version of the novel that was completed in February of 1933. Simkins, in his paper entitled 'The Metaphor of Myth in *To a God Unknown*: John Steinbeck and Joseph Campbell', states that Campbell's presence during the last year of the novel's revision probably prompted Steinbeck (who was already familiar with Jung's thought) to 'bring Jungian themes into the story, which then creates parallels between his and Campbell's heroes'. He is also of the opinion that Campbell indirectly influenced Steinbeck by urging the 'Monterey gang' to read Eckermann's *Conversations With Goethe* and Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Simkins acknowledges Benson's statement that Campbell felt that he had learned more about the relevance of myth from Steinbeck during this period than vice versa (1998:<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>).

The inclusion of the epigraph taken from the Rigveda in *To a God Unknown* early in 1930, provides evidence of Indian religious/philosophical influence in Steinbeck's work some time before he was 'officially' credited with acquiring Oriental (Chinese) insights in the pages of Lao's *Tao Teh Ching* in Ed Ricketts' library. His introduction to the *Tao* may possibly be compared to his 're-discovery' of Jung through Campbell's eyes, which, according to Simkins, prompted him to introduce Jungian themes into the story. Similarly, the stimulus provided by his reading of the Chinese *Tao*, reinforced by discussions held with Ricketts and Campbell, may have contributed to the strong presence of Oriental imagery as well as other elements that are consistent with Eastern philosophy/religion to be found throughout the narrative of *To a God Unknown*. The occurrence of some of these aspects in the narrative of *To a God Unknown* shall be highlighted in this chapter.

Steinbeck's initial introduction to Oriental thought may well be traced to a friend of his Stanford days, who had a rather adventurous background that must have appealed to the 'apprentice author' who later on wrote *Cup of Gold*. He was the Finn, Carl

Wilhelmson who, like Henry Morgan of *Cup of Gold*, ran away from home in his early teens to go to sea aboard a windjammer. Wilhelmson jumped ship in Chile, for which he was jailed, only to be appointed as policeman by the very authorities who had arrested him. Likewise, Morgan, who through the duplicity of the ship's master was forced into indenture as a servant in the West Indies, was granted freedom to pursue his adventures on the high seas. Wilhelmson later on signed on to a British sailing ship which took him to Vancouver, and he worked his way south through the Northwest as a lumberjack and farm hand, until he reached the San Francisco Bay area. He was drafted into the army to serve in World War I, but was soon discharged while in Texas due to a lung disorder, and returned to the Bay area to enrol at Stanford as a 'special student'. Among all Steinbeck's university friends who were interested in becoming writers, Wilhelmson, according to Benson, was the most dedicated and talented. He would eventually publish a novel as well as a book for children, but failure to find a publisher for his second novel, considered by Benson to be an extremely well-written work, put paid to his writing career. Steinbeck, by comparison, succeeded through his persistence, 'which at times was almost superhuman' (Benson, 1984: 119-20). Although the aforementioned parallels between the fortunes of Carl Wilhelmson and those of Henry Morgan may be seen as pure coincidence or conjecture, they are nevertheless interesting, especially in the light of the fact that I am not aware of any reference to such parallels in the context of any analysis or criticism of *Cup of Gold*. Wilhelmson left Stanford in 1925, as Steinbeck did, and taught English in Japan where he obviously came into contact with Oriental philosophy. He stayed with Steinbeck during part of his first winter at Tahoe during 1926-27, while Steinbeck was completing *Cup of Gold* and working on the first versions of what was to become *To a God Unknown*. Wilhelmson also spent part of the summer of 1928 with Steinbeck, and Benson tells about their 'long midnight conversations in which they let their imaginations run free' (Benson, 1984: 119-122). Judging from the general tenor of Steinbeck's letters to Wilhelmson, the two of them had read and discussed a wide range of subjects, including Eastern

philosophy/religion, for Steinbeck, in a letter written early in 1930 to Wilhelmson (before Steinbeck had met Ricketts), refers to the Vedic hymn which he would use as an epilogue in *To a God Unknown* and remarks as follows: 'You surely remember the hymn with its refrain at the end of each invocation "Who is the god to whom we shall offer sacrifice?" Don't you think its a good title?' (Steinbeck, E. and R. Wallsten: 1975: 22). In my opinion, the choice of this hymn as an epilogue and Steinbeck's confident assumption that Wilhelmson knows what he is referring to, indicates that they had discussed the Vedic hymns and provides evidence that Steinbeck was at least familiar with certain aspects of Oriental religious/philosophical thought before he met Ricketts and had access to his copy of the *Tao*.

Taoism has much in common with Indian Buddhism, since it had adopted many features of Indian Mahayana Buddhism by the 5th century AD. And whereas it was 'only' established as a philosophical system in the mid-3rd century BC, Buddhism was founded in India in the 6th and 5th centuries BC (info@encyclopedia.com.), again suggesting the dependence of the former on the latter. It should also be borne in mind that Steinbeck may well have come to know Chinese people during his intermittent spells of employment, including at the Spreckels Sugar Company where he shared a bunkhouse, and as farm hand as well as labourer on a variety of projects. Chinese characters frequently appear in his fiction, including the short story 'Johnny Bear' (1937), and novels such as *Cannery Row* (1945), *East of Eden* (1952), and *Sweet Thursday* (1954). Novels such as *East of Eden*, with its unforgettable Chinese character Lee, reveal that Steinbeck had deep insight with regard to Oriental culture. The East-Asian migration, especially to the Eastern and Western coasts of the United States, gained momentum in the decades after the American Civil War and there were many Chinese settlers in and around Salinas during Steinbeck's youth. Place names such as China Point, mentioned in *To a God Unknown*, reflect the Chinese heritage in the area. The influx of immigrants was only checked by the proclamation of the Immigration Law of 1924

(info@encyclopedia.com.). It is also interesting to note Benson's casual remark (without any attempt at finding a deeper meaning) that Steinbeck, as early as c.1924, considered going to the East, and also to Mexico: 'Thwarted by his previous attempts to go to China and Mexico, he apparently began to think more and more of trying to make his way as a writer in New York' (1984: 85).

It is considered important to establish Steinbeck's early and independent (from Ricketts' influence) interest in the Oriental way of thinking, partly because I believe that this aspect of his philosophical bent has, to a great extent, been ignored in favour of his undisputed Classical background. I also believe that Ricketts' influence on Steinbeck has been overstated, to the extent that Oriental thought, for example, is only really recognised in Steinbeck's post-World War II works, as critics apparently find it hard to credit him with originality in this, or in virtually any other field, without mentioning the name of Ed Ricketts. There is no question about Ricketts' attraction to Eastern thought, and this is recognised by Steinbeck in his posthumous tribute to his friend which appeared in *Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Benson also comments that part of Ricketts' mysticism, in apparent conflict with his Faust-like search, 'was an Oriental acceptance of the many manifestations of reality, whether beautiful or ugly, just or unjust' (1984: 247). This also describes Joseph's attitude in *To a God Unknown* when he, for example, comes to accept, with Oriental (and non-teleological) equanimity, the leader of the wild boars' cannibalism, the murder of Benjy, Burton's girdling of the oak tree, and Elizabeth's violent death by accident. There are also many instances in the novel where Joseph reveals a teleological approach in looking at natural phenomena and where his mystical instincts cloud his better judgement. It is, however, his refusal, right up to the end, to deal with the drought on non-teleological terms that leads to his self-sacrifice and his obstinate blindness in this regard is also part of the central problem of the novel.

Benson describes, through the eyes of their mutual friend, Richard Albee, how Steinbeck and Ricketts would discuss a subject in very similar terms, seemingly agreeing with one another, while they were in actuality talking in parallel, each with his own frame of reference (1984: 246). This also seems to be true of their approaches to philosophy, and I am of the opinion that the origin of Oriental thinking in *To a God Unknown* should be approached in the same way in which Benson deals with Steinbeck's independent arrival at non-teleological thought, as described hereunder.

Non-teleological thinking, as revealed in Steinbeck's writing, provides another example of an approach which critics often attribute solely to Ricketts' influence. Although Ricketts, according to Benson, is the coiner of the term 'non-teleological', Benson states that Steinbeck was by nature, 'from his high school days or before ... a non-teleological thinker' (1984: 242). According to Benson, the character of the protagonist in *To a God Unknown* was shaped long before Steinbeck had met Ricketts:

The character of Joseph Wayne, so long in the making prior to Steinbeck's relationship with Ricketts, suggests that the role of the non-teleological observer was in progress and created without the input of Ricketts' philosophy. Indeed, what apparently attracted Steinbeck to Ricketts was that the biologist fit the role he had already created, and as the friendship progressed, Ricketts became more and more the living model for the role (1984: 246).

Benson furthermore states that both men came into the relationship with well-established philosophies: 'One could just as well ask, "How did Steinbeck influence Ricketts?"' (1984: 246-247). Benson points out that the Steinbeck/Ricketts relationship was rather one of mutual and 'commensal' enrichment than a matter of influence, as reflected, for example, in their different approaches to science and art:

Furthermore, what we see here in Steinbeck's early exposure to (and in my view, adoption of) the premises of scientific materialism is the beginning of a lifelong philosophical attachment to science, an attachment that brings us to an important difference between Steinbeck's thought and that of Ricketts. While Steinbeck, the artist, constantly looked toward science for enlightenment, Ricketts, the scientist, was more inclined to look toward art. In other words, Steinbeck was really more of the 'scientist', at least in attitude and expectation, than Ricketts, and possibly more the scientist by temperament as well. This reversal would appear to be another aspect of the commensal relationship which bound the two men so closely together in friendship (1984: 236).

This difference in approach is also reflected in their views on what they referred to as 'breaking through' (to what can be termed a concept of ultimate Truth), and is discussed in the context of *To a God Unknown* hereunder. Benson, however, remains convinced that Classical thinking formed the mainstay of Steinbeck's philosophical approach. The Greek concept of nature that Steinbeck adopted, according to Benson, is summarised as follows by B.A.G. Fuller:

We have been accustomed to think of a universe, composed of dead matter and inhabited by a few living beings, which has been created out of nothing to serve as the staging and scenery for the all-important drama of human life. But to the Greek mind nature was living and companionable through and through ... Hence man found himself on a familiar and friendly footing with the whole of nature, at home in the world ... It is very difficult for us with our conditioning to enter into this fellow-feeling for the universe. The imaginative child perhaps still enjoys it (1984: 234).

Benson states that Steinbeck remained an imaginative child, in this as well as other respects: 'He always saw nature in an intimate relationship with man, often presenting a reflection of man's emotions and desires. While his thinking was often inductive, scientific, there was also something deductive in his acceptance of nature on its own terms and in his refusal to make nature a secondary reflection of something else'. Benson cites Steinbeck's continued reading of Greek history and philosophy, long after college, as suggestive of a strong sympathy for the ancient Greek world view (1984: 234). Ancient Greek mythology, which is often closely linked with nature, therefore also serves as a model for myth-making and allegory (in the broadest sense of the words) and examples of this are frequently found in *To a God Unknown*, as discussed below.

According to Benson, Steinbeck was also heavily influenced by Harold Chapman Brown, a lecturer in history of philosophy during Steinbeck's Stanford days. Brown believed that modern philosophy should work hand in hand with science. He taught that science discovers and describes the characteristics of the physical universe which, in turn, philosophy tries to fit together into a larger picture and to make relevant to man's position and condition. Man is but a physical object among others, an integrated whole existing within other integrated wholes which, ultimately, operate within the larger integrated whole of the physical universe. He viewed beauty, character, and thought itself, together with its products, as part of nature. He did not believe in a separate world of the spirit, of the mind, or of the ideal: the distinction between organic and inorganic matter, according to Brown, being merely one of complexity and kind. To him life was the name for a delicately organised dynamic balance in complex molecular structures. Benson states that, in summary, Brown argued (in an essay written in 1925) for a scientific materialism: 'These ideas, with some later modification, became fundamental to Steinbeck's philosophical perception of the universe ... [and he became] ... probably the most thoroughgoing naturalist among modern writers' (Benson, 1984: 235-236). According to Benson, Steinbeck shared Brown's belief in building a personal, open-

ended philosophy that is capable of standing the test of experience while remaining useful. Steinbeck, hence, became a philosopher always 'in progress', believing as Brown did, that 'for the thinker, his metaphysics cannot first be established and then his programme of life unfolded, but the two grow together into an integrated coherent whole. His philosophy is then inductively and not deductively established'. Benson states that with this approach to life in the background of Steinbeck's thinking, 'it cannot be a coincidence that the most common failure of his fictional characters is a failure of vision, nor that his most persistent theme is that of perception' (1984: 236-237). This is particularly applicable to Joseph in *To a God Unknown* and shall be discussed more fully in due course.

Brown's influence on Steinbeck was, however, tempered by the philosophy of Professor John Elof Boodin, who was one of the favourite lecturers of a friend of Steinbeck's, Richard Albee, who majored in philosophy at UCLA. For several years, according to Benson, 'Albee's youthful excitement added fuel to the fire of the Steinbeck-Ricketts passion for ideas' (1984: 267). Another influence on Steinbeck's thinking at the time was the theories of W.C. Allee, a University of Chicago biologist who worked with Ricketts and whose thinking helped Steinbeck to formalise his idea of the group as a separate organism, which amounted to more than the sum total of its constituent parts. Steinbeck actually wrote a formal essay entitled 'Argument of Phalanx' on the subject during June of 1933 (Benson, 1984: 266-267). However, Boodin seemed to have taken over from Brown as the 'central pillar in Steinbeck's philosophical pantheon' (Benson, 1984: 267). An aspect of Boodin's philosophical thought that may be germane to Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*, is his efforts to reconcile science, particularly evolutionary theory and scientific methodology, with humane values and, especially, the concept of an impersonal God as a controlling principle. According to Benson, 'Boodin shared Brown's enthusiasm for scientific method as well as his pragmatism, but differed from the materialist in that he also wrote of a 'cosmic idealism' in which matter responds

to the control of Form (that is, God), which coexists with matter' (1984: 267-268). Steinbeck was most impressed, especially with Boodin's ideas concerning the juncture of individual minds brought together in a larger whole, with properties of its own – as these thoughts accorded with his own 'phalanx' theory which is so effectively illustrated by means of music and dance at the festival portrayed on pages 109-112 of *To a God Unknown*. According to Benson, these ideas came to Steinbeck late in 1932. As the manuscript of *To a God Unknown* was posted to his agent during the latter half of February 1933, it is difficult to judge the extent (if any) to which Boodin's ideas may have entered Steinbeck's final version of the novel. It is, however, interesting to note that the novel reflects a search for the 'unknown god' – a mystic or 'religious' quest for ultimate truth that Steinbeck seems to have in common with Boodin. However, each chose his own scientific, or rather metaphorical, terms to 'clothe a naked thing', as Joseph of the novel remarks to the old man in a different context, 'and the thing is ridiculous in clothes' (Steinbeck, 1933: 182). Boodin chooses to speak of his concept of an unknown and impersonal God as 'a controlling principle' and as 'cosmic idealism' within which matter responds to the control of 'Form' (that is, God); Steinbeck, in his short essay, 'Argument of Phalanx' written in the summer of 1933, speaks of 'the creator beast, the phalanx'. His essay begins as follows:

Men are not final individuals but units in the creator beast, the phalanx. Within the body of man are units, cells, some highly specialized and some coordinate, which have their natures and their lives, which die and are replaced, which suffer and are killed. In their billions they make up man, the new individual. But man is more than the total of his cells, and his nature is not that of the sum of all his cells. He has a nature new and strange to his cells. Man is a unit of the great beast, the phalanx. The phalanx has pains, desires, hungers and strivings as different from those of the unit man's as man's are different from the unit-cells'. The nature of the phalanx is not the sum of the natures of unit-men, but a new

individual having emotions and ends of its own, and these are foreign and incomprehensible to unit-men (Benson, 1984: 268-269).

Steinbeck (during the latter half of 1933) acknowledged his own inadequacy in expressing his ideas which he experienced as 'a tremendous and terrible poetry ... I am neither scientist nor profound investigator. But I am experiencing an emotional vastness in working this out. The difficulty of writing the poetry is so great that I am not even contemplating it until I have absorbed and made a part of my body the thesis as a whole' (Benson, 1984: 266). *To a God Unknown*, which he had just completed, was not yet the vehicle that he sought to carry the 'thesis and the theme' of his 'poetry'. He would continue his Arthurian Quest in search of 'some magic key he was missing, some chord of inspiration that once apprehended would lead to a breakthrough', as mentioned by Benson in the context of Steinbeck's difficulty in writing his version of the *Morte d'Arthur* (1984: 855). This Quest is comparable to Joseph's search in *To a God Unknown* for some belief, ritual, or mystical procedure by which he could end the drought. But it is also a mystic and religious search for 'the unknown God', who defies description and can only be alluded to in metaphorical terms. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck attempts to describe his vision of this 'Entity' as ultimate unity with the Whole – the closest that one can come to a formulation of his 'religion':

... groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it ... And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable (1951: 216-217).

Arnold L. Goldsmith, in his article entitled 'Thematic Rhythm in *The Red Pony*', which appears in R.S. Hughes' *John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1989), cites an example from *The Red Pony* in which Steinbeck succeeds most effectively to render dramatically his passionate belief in the oneness of all life. As two of the four parts of *The Red Pony* were actually published in 1933 as short stories, before *To a God Unknown*, it is representative of his thought at the time. The example that follows, taken from the chapter entitled 'The Great Mountains', serves to illustrate, perhaps more effectively than *To a God Unknown*, the almost perfect fusion of character, theme and setting that Steinbeck is capable of achieving. This may serve as a benchmark against which the realisation of his goal can be measured in *To a God Unknown*. The special poignancy found in *The Red Pony* can be attributed to the fact that it is to a great extent the story of Steinbeck's own childhood, completed during a time when he was nursing his dying mother and witnessing his father's unravelling under the strain (Benson: 261-263). Goldsmith points out that, to Jody, the mountains represent the mysterious, un-lived life that lies ahead, but for the old man, Gitano, they stand for the mystery of death. Beyond them lies the sea which represents eternity. As Gitano rides off into the mountains, he carries with him a long rapier with a golden basket hilt, a family heirloom passed down to him by his father. This rapier, according to Goldsmith, adds just the right touch of myth and folklore to the ancient legend of an old man returning to his birthplace to die. It echoes the classical tradition of weapons such as King Arthur's sword, Excalibur, the magical sword of Beowulf, the shield of Achilles, and even the long rifle of Natty Bumppo. To Jody, Gitano is 'mysterious like the mountains. There were ranges back as far as you could see, but behind the last range piled up against the sky there was a great unknown country. And Gitano was an old man, 'until you got to the dull dark eyes. And in behind them was some unknown thing' (1945: 68). Goldsmith points out that the mountains are an extension of Gitano, and Gitano in turn, is an extension of the old horse with its protruding ribs and hip-bones. All three blend into one

as Jody watches them disappear in the distance, lying in the green grass near the water-tub, the symbol of life and timelessness (Goldsmith in Hughes, 1989: 192-193):

For a moment he thought he could see a black speck crawling up the farthest ridge. Jody thought of the rapier and Gitano. And he thought of the great mountains. A longing caressed him, and it was so sharp that he wanted to cry to get it out of his breast. He lay down in the green grass near the round tub at the brush line. He covered his eyes with his crossed arms and lay there a long time, and he was full of a nameless sorrow (1945: 72).

In contrast to the almost seamless execution of the novelist's craft which is evident in this example from *The Red Pony*, *To a God Unknown* did not start off as Steinbeck's 'own' story, and it presents a confluence of complex and sometimes conflicting elements that are difficult to reconcile, especially for critics that do not take the Oriental approach to opposites into consideration. The great diversity of these elements also makes it necessary to restrict the explication of the narrative to main aspects of the novel in order to conform to the limited scope of this dissertation. The 'theme', as Steinbeck (according to Benson) called it, amounts to 'a sudden perception of the synthesis of many associated ideas – mythic, psychological, and naturalistic-scientific which [Steinbeck] had used to shape the final version of *To a God Unknown*' (Benson, 1984: 265). The richness of this mixture together with the cognitive dissonance which Steinbeck seems to entertain in his acceptance of apparently conflicting ideas, failed to impress most critics of the time. For example, Woodburn O. Ross, one of Steinbeck's more benevolent critics, is troubled by the apparent discrepancies which he perceived to be present in *To a God Unknown*. In his essay, 'John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars' (1946), which appeared in *Steinbeck and His Critics*, Ross states that the author seems to be over-ambitious in attempting to marry his 'scientific predilections and expressed objections to other than purely descriptive [or non-teleological] thinking' with

an 'almost mystical' approach to the objective world and a 'loving acceptance of whatever is' (Tedlock, E.W. and C.V. Wicker, 1969: 169). Benson, commenting about Steinbeck's experimental stories written as early as 1924, also remarks on 'the dichotomy so pervasive in his work between the romantic and realistic. Here it appears as if these two modes are grappling with each other for supremacy, trying to force the writer to some kind of decision' (1984: 76). These views of Steinbeck's 'over-ambitious efforts' at marrying discrepant elements are deemed to be invalid, especially by Oriental scholars in recent times, who point out the inter-related nature of opposites as portrayed, for example, in the well-known Taoist yin yang symbol. Acceptance of the intertwined nature of discrete and/or discrepant elements within a circle which signifies unity, accords with Steinbeck's 'is' (or non-teleological) thinking, which obviates an answer to the question 'why?' I shall therefore not attempt to 'resolve' the apparent discrepancies that may be encountered in Steinbeck's sometimes Quixotic quest for Truth as portrayed in *To a God Unknown*, but rather deal with his narrative in the non-teleological spirit in which he and Ed Ricketts set out on their voyage described in *Log From The Sea of Cortez*:

One of the reasons we gave ourselves ... was *to observe* the distribution of invertebrates, *to see and to record* their kinds and numbers, how they lived together, what they ate, and how they reproduced ... *Our curiosity was not limited*, but was as wide and horizonless as that of Darwin or Linnaeus or Pliny. *We wanted to see everything* our eyes would accommodate, *to think what we could, and, out of our seeing and thinking, to build some kind of structure in modelled imitation to the observed reality* [my emphasis throughout](1941: 2).

Joseph's initial 'hunger' for land of his own is a typical American dream that was voiced by settlers since early times and finds expression in works such as St. Jean De Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, wherein he speaks of the significance

of land ownership and cultivation and expresses the sentiment that 'the simple cultivation of the earth purifies them [the farmers]' (1925: 444). When Joseph for the first time gazes at his new land, he feels that 'he had been dull and now was sensitized; had been asleep and was awakened ... When he mounted his horse again he knew that he could never lose the feeling for the land' (1933: 5). However, as described by Lisca, he soon develops a 'mystic and ritualistic relationship to the land' which goes far beyond the normal attachment that a farmer has for land of his own (1958: 44).

It is also deemed necessary to consider the possibility that the protagonist's epic journey across the breadth of America in search of a new home is a spiritual journey of man in search of himself. This view is strengthened by the fact that Steinbeck devotes only two sentences in his novel to convey the idea that Joseph had travelled all the way from the Wayne farm near Pittsford in Vermont to his new home in California:

He went away before the spring had come, and the grass was green on the hills in California when he arrived. After a time of wandering, Joseph came to the long valley called Nuestra Señora, and there he recorded his homestead (Steinbeck, 1933: 9-10).

In the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Steinbeck also makes it clear that 'the story is a parable'. Joseph must therefore also be viewed as a kind of knight errant in search of his own holy grail. In this regard, it may also be useful to consider the views of Georg Lukacs, first expressed in the German language in 1914-15 in an historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature. Lukacs' essay was written in an atmosphere of impending doom that threatened the European Continent prior to World War I, but when it is considered that this was still the heyday of American Transcendental thought, there are many points of comparison to be found between ideas expressed in his essay and the aforementioned philosophy. The essay was first

published in Berlin in 1920 but only translated and published in English in 1971. It is decidedly an essay of prophetic vision and is, in my opinion, greatly applicable to novels in general, but also to the Arthurian theme and to *To a God Unknown* in particular. The following excerpt has specific application to the novel:

The novel tells of the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence ... The novel hero's psychology is the field of action of the demonic. Biological and sociological life has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence; men want only to live, structures want to remain intact; and because of the remoteness, the absence of an effective God, the indolent self-complacency of this quietly decaying life would be the only power in the world if men did not sometimes fall prey to the power of the demon and overreach themselves in ways that have no reason and cannot be explained by reason, challenging all the psychological or sociological foundations of their existence (Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel*: 1920: 89-90). (By 'demonic' Lukacs appears to mean 'daemonic', which I understand to be an independent, god-like energy not subject to rule and measure.)

The devious journeys of the soul in search of itself and the tensions that arise in and around men that 'overreach themselves in ways that have no reason and cannot be explained by reason', also find expression in Oriental philosophy. P. Balaswamy, Reader in the English Department of the Pondicherry University, India, deals with these matters among others in his paper entitled 'John Steinbeck in the Indus Valley' which was delivered at the Fourth International Steinbeck Congress held at San Jose and Monterey, California, during March 1997. Balaswamy states that 'the philosophical base of Steinbeck's noteworthy novels – *To a God Unknown*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery*

Row – has many strands similar to the Indian view of life'. He explains that the self-sacrifice of Joseph to 'a God Unknown' accords with Steinbeck's belief 'that the universe is permeated by an Immanent Spirit'. This may be 'unknown' to American readers, but Indian readers immediately recognise the Advaitic root of that belief: 'When Casey and Tom of *The Grapes of Wrath* [say] that "all men got one big soul everybody's part of", and "there ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue", they merely voice Steinbeck's belief in the non-dualism of the Indian *Upanishads*' (1997: <http://www.sju.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>).

According to Balaswamy, characters in Steinbeck's novels are often depraved and/or deprived individuals who fight courageously for survival as well as to regain or retain their integrity and dignity. For example, in *Cannery Row*, which appears to be merely a light-hearted novel about bums and whores, there 'is a serious ideology imbedded so deeply that many readers would miss the fact that it is an American version of the Indian concept of *Maya*'. Balaswamy points out that the 'whores, pimps, gamblers and sons of bitches' that some would identify in the novel, 'are so because of a wrong perception', and that they can also be seen as 'saints and angels and martyrs and holy men' when viewed from a different perspective: 'It is a kind of inner vision that [makes] Steinbeck come out with a "poem" called *Cannery Row*. What is "a poisoned cream puff" for the American critics is really [a] ... scrutiny of humanity and a defence of poetry' (1997: <http://www.sju.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>).

Balaswamy is of the opinion that the 'dubious battles' being waged on the streets of India today 'for religious, regional, casteistic, linguistic, political and economic reasons', can be compared to those described in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, and 'have [most] valid hints for the embattled psyche of ... modern man'. Balaswamy commends Steinbeck's non-teleological approach as a means towards a solution: 'A calm awareness of the issues involved, an objective attitude towards all persons and a

readiness to understand the other, opposite, point of view, as suggested by Steinbeck, have the greatest relevance to any country of the world'. He points out that the absence of despair in Steinbeck's novels makes him a favourite among Indian/Eastern readers:

Even though he dons the robe of the satirist, especially in his earliest novels, to paint the follies of man, he [doesn't] simply give up humanity. Readers in the East have generally found the nihilistic, Absurd vision of the great modernists such as Hemingway, Kafka, Camus, Beckett et al. a bit unconvincing and life-denying. The modern Western man has gone through a religious crisis during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, driving him to a belief in the Absurd vision of humanity and the world. The Indians have not experienced any crisis of faith, so the existential philosophy has only a limited appeal to them. They find Steinbeck's affirmation of life and his celebration of human spirit quite exhilarating. His declaration that 'a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature', is fully endorsed by the Indian readers (1997: <http://www.sju.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>).

Sentimentality as a recurrent element in Steinbeck's fiction provides another example that can be used to illustrate the difference between Eastern and Western thought. The only character that can be viewed as being 'sentimental' in *To a God Unknown* is Juanito, who cares for the weak-minded Willie Romas up to the end and who worships Joseph in a way that is reminiscent of the 'beloved disciple', Peter's, devotion to Jesus Christ. This, however, cannot be interpreted as gratuitous sentiment, because Steinbeck intended Juanito's 'discipleship' to strengthen the reader's perception of Joseph as a Christ-like figure. Willie, incidentally, is the first of many 'deformed' characters who appear in Steinbeck's fiction, including Tualarecito in *The Pastures of Heaven*, and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. Such characters are never used by Steinbeck to arouse the

reader's sympathy or to shock – they always serve a distinct purpose in the theme of the narrative and, in accordance with the Oriental view, can be seen to represent the necessary opposite of 'wholeness', in the same sense that yin is the necessary, integrated opposite of yang. Balaswamy defends elements of sentimentality in Steinbeck's fiction and explains that, from an Indian perspective, it is considered to be a positive attribute:

Adopting a sentimental view is natural to a compassionate, tender-hearted person, whose world view enables him [to have] an understanding beyond logic. The coldly objective Western mind may abhor that art which has a maudlin element in it, but the Indians are tolerant of sentimentality. So they love the climactic scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the scenes in *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *Sweet Thursday*. Man is after all a bundle of emotions, sweet and bitter, and a writer such as Steinbeck is loved since he generates many emotions (1997: <http://www.sju.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>).

Meyer, in his aforementioned essay comments on Steinbeck's recurrent usage of water imagery, also to be found in *To a God Unknown*, where rain and drought, for example, may be seen to offer both positive and negative (yang and yin) innuendoes: 'Water can be both harsh and mild, can imply laughter or tears, can cause joy or pain. As a symbol for the wordlessness, it helps Steinbeck express the inexpressible. As Lao reminds us, "Rippling is the Way, flowing left and right ... Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures but also struggles to occupy the place loathed by the masses. Therefore it is near the Way"'. The essay reiterates Lisca's view that specific passages of the Taoist text are reinterpreted and rephrased by Steinbeck (in *Cannery Row*) 'as if designed for digestion by a more modern audience'. It is stated in the essay that, after thorough study of Steinbeck's work and discussion with experts on Eastern religions, the conclusion was reached that:

... many of the philosophical underpinnings of Steinbeck's moral messages to his public are very closely related to the teachings of this 3rd century BC Chinese philosopher. If modern critics were to look closely, I believe that they would discover a far greater scope of the Tao's influence than Lisca ever envisioned in chapter 6 of *Nature and Myth* ... kernels of Taoist thought and Lao Tze's tenets extend widely into the Steinbeck canon, and deserve far greater attention than they have received to this point in Steinbeck scholarship (1997: webmaster @www.hkis.edu.hk).

It is also noteworthy that Steinbeck lists Lao Tze along with Plato, Christ and Buddha as 'one of the great ones' in his *Journal of a Novel* (Steinbeck, 1969: 153). But unlike the embattled fruit pickers of *In Dubious Battle*, and the 'warriors' in India's streets mentioned by Balaswamy, the 'great ones' generally shunned physical force as well as premeditated action to attain their goals. These are considered to be teleological methods that do not lead towards Truth and Wholeness. Their approach can rather be compared to a quest for balance between opposing forces, as expressed in the well-known *tai chi* physical exercises used by Asians to foster peaceful existence through the attainment of contentment and the avoidance of force. This also reminds one of the disciplines involved in the practice of ancient Oriental martial arts, that emphasise the importance of control and balance, and are only put into practice under circumstances that demand the preservation of life itself. Meyer, in his aforementioned essay, admits that, 'the paradoxes and seeming contradictions found in the Tao's pages must have initially confounded Steinbeck even as they puzzle today's Western readers. For the Tao holds that: "to be obscure is to be wise; to fail is to succeed; that the moral life is one of inaction and that force always defeats itself'. The latter tenet is one of the central principles which practitioners of the ancient martial arts use to defeat their attackers. Force generated by the enemy is 'turned around' by the defender to bring about the

about the downfall of the attacker by means of his own momentum. Meyer, in his essay, points out that if, according to Lao, 'being great involves flowing ever onward and flowing onward implies far reaching, and far reaching implies universal [influence], [then] water is an appropriate way ... to express the paradoxical qualities that typify Taoist thought and Steinbeckian philosophy'. According to the essay, Steinbeck's non-teleological approach in his search for wholeness mirrors the Taoist principle of 'just being', or *wu wei*, and Steinbeck advocates 'doing not doing', or *wei wu wei*, as a way for mankind to break through to larger understandings than at first seem possible or probable. Like Lao Tze, Steinbeck would have his readers accept what *is* rather than force or impose an unnatural order. Meyer states that non-teleology concurs with Lao Tze's thinking in that, 'all calculated systems, every attempt to arrange life in apple pie order is pointless and ... man's general tendency is to approach life in the wrong modes, ones which will create acrimony rather than peace' (1997: webmaster@www.hkis.edu.hk).

Joseph, in *To a God Unknown*, succeeds at the moment of his death to 'break through' to the understanding 'that man must accept events in nature that contradict his values, since the pattern of nature is not only beyond his comprehension, but also beyond his power to alter significantly' (Benson, 1984: 249). To reach this realisation entails a spiritual journey in which Steinbeck's fictional characters typically set out to 'overcome [their] personal prejudices and predilections, as well as cultural projections onto reality, in order to see things as they are'. Steinbeck's hope for man, according to Benson, was that he should see clearly in order to survive – not by being the most ferocious animal in the jungle, but 'by his proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit'. Unlike Ricketts, to whom life seemed like 'a long, dark tunnel with a flickering light at the end ... where man might reach at last the peace that passeth all understanding', Steinbeck believed that 'life was not a struggle towards anything, but a constant process in it. That dark tunnel, if that's what it is, is all we have, and in it man must wage an "endless war

against weakness and despair". The only light that we have is the light we create for ourselves by our courage, compassion, and love' (Benson, 1984: 250).

Having established the premise that, in *To a God Unknown*, Joseph's journey from east to west is considered to be more than a physical search for land of his own, it is necessary to explore the protagonist's quest upon arrival in his new land in terms of the author's insights with regard to both Occidental and Oriental philosophy. It is also necessary to revisit Steinbeck's words as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter: 'The new eye is being opened here in the West – the new seeing. It is probable that no one will know it for two hundred years'. Benson remarks that the passage from which this line is taken, once more, underlines Steinbeck's view of his own work as far broader and deeper in intent than we usually have conceived it to be:

He saw himself, particularly in regard to his long novels, as a writer searching out the essential drama of man in nature. He was not in his own mind a local-color writer or recorder of the times; rather, he felt that he was using Western American experience as a special window by which he could lead us to re-discover man's identity in respect to his environment. He was descended, in vision and intent, from the Greeks, rather than American transcendentalism or American realism-naturalism; he thought in terms of the *Iliad*, not in terms of *Sister Carrie* or *The Octopus*. If he had labelled himself at this point in his career, he would probably have called himself a 'symbolist'. (1984: 261).

Although Benson's views of Steinbeck's philosophy are perfectly valid if they are accepted in terms of Occidental thought expressed in a Western American idiom, it should be pointed out that he – like many other Steinbeck scholars before (and after) him – seems to totally disregard the possibility of Oriental influence in *To a God Unknown*. For that matter, he also disclaims Transcendentalist influences in Steinbeck's

work. Whilst heeding Benson's warning that 'working backward from fiction to an underlying philosophy from a specific source can be dangerous work', it must be stressed that his words of caution seem to be aimed at critics that would identify sources with which they are familiar, and not necessarily those which have shaped the thoughts of the writers. More specifically, he is concerned about identification with American writers and thinkers such as Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, while he clearly believes that Steinbeck was influenced by ancient Greek philosophy and by Jung and Boodin (1984: 233-34). While Benson finds evidence of 'the assembled elements of a doctrine shared by several Eastern religions' in Ricketts' thought, he is convinced that Ricketts did not influence his friend to a religious point of view: 'Steinbeck remained an agnostic and, essentially, a materialist – but Ricketts' religious acceptance did tend to work on his friend, moderating ... his rage and persuading him in his daily life to take a larger perspective' (1984: 248). It would therefore seem that, according to Benson, the Oriental world-view does not even enter the picture as far as Steinbeck's work is concerned. Furthermore, it would seem that the Rigveda-derived epigraph which Steinbeck used to set the tone of his story, is viewed by most scholars and critics as a rather clever and useful device employed to add a sense of Oriental mysticism to the plot or, at worst, as merely a gratuitous adornment of the narrative, and not as an early indication of Steinbeck's serious exploration of Oriental thought. It also seems a pity that Lisca, in his *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth*, only looks for evidence of extensive Oriental influence in Steinbeck's post-World War II works – especially in *Cannery Row*, but not in earlier works such as *To a God Unknown*, *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, and others. This pattern seems to be followed by other scholars and critics, at least in the Western world. For example, in November 1998, I received the following reply from Professor Susan Shillinglaw, Professor of English and Director of the Steinbeck Research Centre, San Jose State University, to my question concerning the possible presence of Oriental influence in Steinbeck's work prior to 1930, when he met Ed Ricketts:

I can't confirm that Steinbeck had contact with any Asian thought before he met Ricketts – check Bob DeMott's *Steinbeck's Reading*. Surely Ricketts was the main influence here – as was, perhaps, J. Campbell, who was in Monterey in 1932. I agree that there are many Buddhist and Taoist currents in *To a God Unknown* ... (shilling@email.sjsu.edu).

As stated before, there seems to be no documentary evidence available of material about Oriental thought read by Steinbeck prior to his introduction to the *Tao* in Ricketts' library in 1930. This, however, cannot be seen as positive proof that Steinbeck had never read anything about the Oriental world view before he had met Ricketts. After all, Simkins, in his partially annotated 'Select Steinbeck Research Bibliography', describes Robert DeMott's *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed* as a 'tool which strives [my emphasis] to clarify what books Steinbeck owned and which he read' (<http://ocean.st.edu/~wsimkins/steinbib.html>). DeMott's catalogue does not claim to be the last word concerning Steinbeck's reading. Although Steinbeck's 'discovery' of the *Tao* may well account for 'the many Buddhist and Taoist currents in *To a God Unknown*', as confirmed by Professor Shillinglaw, yet it is strange that such influence has apparently never been 'officially' recognised by scholars such as Benson or by critics of this novel. This also applies to all of the novels written prior to *Cannery Row* (which appeared in 1945), whose Oriental elements were noted by Lisca. It is only in recent times that Oriental influence has been recognised by scholars such as Dr Michael Meyer (who is, notably, attached to a Chinese school) in non-fiction such as *Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941), as set out in his essay of 1997. This aspect of Steinbeck's thought (*before*, as well as *after* meeting Ricketts) therefore seems to require further investigation, especially in view of Steinbeck's popularity in the Asian world and the Oriental identification with his world view, which seems to accord so remarkably with theirs. Meyer, in the aforementioned essay, states that:

... even [if] minor Taoist precepts can be seen in the works of Steinbeck, this is a fruitful area of inquiry for future critics to pursue ... [as] the remainder of Steinbeck's canon will no doubt reveal that portions of this Eastern philosophy clearly form integral parts of many of Steinbeck's novels as he incorporates the ideas gleaned from his journey on the *Western Flyer* and interrelates them with his reading of ancient Chinese wisdom (webmaster@www.hkis.edu.hk).

To this, I would like to add that I believe that elements of Oriental philosophy that are now recognised by scholars such as Shillinglaw to be present in *To a God Unknown*, may not be solely due to Steinbeck's exposure to the (Chinese) *Tao*, or to Ricketts' or Campbell's influence, but may have been part (however small) of his world view prior to this exposure. This would explain the inclusion of the (Indian) Rigveda-derived epigraph in his novel early in 1930, when he was still living in Eagle Rock and had not yet met Ricketts or Campbell. According to Benson, Steinbeck met Ricketts in October 1930, after he had moved to the Monterey peninsula (1984: 184). If my assumption proves to be true, Oriental influence may then also be discovered in his work prior to 1930. Such a finding may then, with some modification, be dealt with as Benson does with Steinbeck's non-teleological instincts prior to his 'discovery' of the necessary vocabulary, provided by Ricketts, to express his thoughts:

The precise source of these ideas in his life is impossible to trace. We can guess that it was probably a mixture of influences and events: a rejection of Christianity, because it represented for him middle-class respectability and because it seemed irrelevant and untrue; his early fondness for such writers as Mark Twain and Jack London; conversations during college years with men in the fields who advocated a socialist-atheist point of view; and exposure to the materialistic philosophy of Harold Chapman Brown (1984: 242).

On a certain level, Steinbeck, in referring to 'the new eye being opened' in the West (in the epigraph to this chapter), may well have meant a re-discovery, by means of Occidental thought, of 'man's identity in respect to his environment', as inferred by Benson (1984: 261). But the new, non-teleological way of 'seeing' is also a thoroughly Oriental way of looking at things and Steinbeck may be urging his readers to adopt this view in their search for understanding and Truth. Yuji Kami, Associate Professor of English at Soka University, Japan, in his paper entitled 'Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown* and Emerson's *Nature*: Similarities and Differences Between the Two', which he delivered at the Fourth International Steinbeck Congress held in San Jose and Monterey during March 1997, states that Emerson used the image of 'a transparent eyeball' as a symbol of the mystical unity between man and nature in his major work *Nature*, in which he stated the principles of the Transcendentalist movement. He compares this image with Joseph's experience at his death and quotes Steinbeck and Emerson, respectively: 'Joseph's body "grew huge and light. It arose into the sky" like "a transparent eye-ball", which Emerson symbolises as the unity of man and nature in *Nature*. Finally, Joseph is transformed into the divine by devoting his life to nature, or a God Unknown in the collective unconscious'. Kami states that both Emerson and Steinbeck seek for the unity of man in nature, the only difference being that Emerson strongly endorses idealism while 'Steinbeck has developed his own thought from the standpoint of a kind of materialism ... the former thinks of nature as controllable, while the latter thinks of it as uncontrollable ... In *To a God Unknown*, the unity of man and nature can be seen in the unconscious world of Joseph Wayne' (<http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>). Here we have a Transcendentalist view of Steinbeck's thinking as expressed in *To a God Unknown* – a view which Benson totally rejects. Such a point of departure, however, will greatly help to explain early Oriental influence in Steinbeck's work, as the Transcendentalists were, as a matter of record, influenced by Oriental philosophy. This is borne out, for example, by the passage from Confucius as

quoted in the epigraph of chapter five of this dissertation, and as used by Thoreau in the journal *Dial* (Godhes, C. et al, 1962: 26). Acceptance of Transcendental influence in Steinbeck's work would also make the question concerning the source of Oriental elements in Steinbeck's early fiction less of a problem, as he would have 'absorbed' such influence from his reading of the Transcendentalists, whose work he was familiar with. A more complete understanding of the influence of Oriental thought on Transcendentalist philosophy and their combined influence as expressed in Steinbeck's work would, however, require a separate, comprehensive investigation which is not possible within the limits of this dissertation. It is, however, necessary to go beyond the simplistic approach adopted by, for example, Warren French, who accepts Transcendentalist influence in Steinbeck's novel but does not make provision for the Oriental aspects of such an approach. The result is that he finds the novel to be 'incomprehensible in realistic terms unless one supposes that the principal characters suffer from hallucinations'. French can therefore confidently pronounce *To a God Unknown* to be 'an overwrought allegory in which Steinbeck fails – as he does again in *East of Eden* – to fuse effectively realistic and symbolic elements' (1961: 47). In line with contemporary views of Steinbeck's work, as briefly outlined above, this dissertation takes cognisance of Oriental thought as an intrinsic part of the Transcendentalist approach.

In *To a God Unknown*, Joseph only gains his new vision (the 'new seeing' mentioned in the epigraph to this chapter) when he is about to die, and this may be intended to sound a note of warning in a story that involves 'a race, growth and death' (1984: 260). Steinbeck makes it clear that he expects his 'parable' to be 'discovered' as 'a novel about the world' and 'about people ... but not the world apart from man – the world *and* man – the one inseparable unit'. This demands even more than the 'universal interpretation' usually called for in the explication of novels, as *To a God Unknown* inspired Steinbeck to tell his friend Dook Sheffield about his almost prophetic vision of

Joseph as a kind of prototype man, who outgrows his world and enters the cosmos as 'a giant shouldering his way among the ages, pushing the stars aside to make a passage to god'. If Steinbeck had been a writer of science fiction, he would indeed have had ample reason to claim prophetic foresight (clothed, as is the custom, in metaphorical terms) in view of the fact that his 'vision of Joseph' was written in 1933 and that the first cosmonaut circled the earth in 1961. Furthermore, the first man landed on the moon in July 1969, just more than four months after Steinbeck's death on 20 December, 1968. Although he never claimed such vision, it is nevertheless tempting to extrapolate Steinbeck's rather poetic but astonishingly accurate vision of man 'overreaching' himself – to embark upon an almost allegorical search for God among the stars, only to find that 'the kingdom of God is within [himself]' (Luke 17: 21). However, for the limited purposes of this dissertation, Joseph's quest must best be approached in terms of his times and in the same way that Steinbeck wrote about the voyage which he undertook with Ed Ricketts in *Log from the Sea of Cortez* and as quoted by Meyer in his essay:

[it was] not only a practical voyage ... but ... a search for something that seem[ed] like the truth to us, [a] search for understanding, for that principle which keys us deeply into the pattern of all life; [a] search for the relation of things one to another ... a warm wholeness where every sight and object and odor and experience seem to key into the gigantic whole ... a place where even human sacrifice has the effect of creating a wholeness of sense and emotion ... the good, bad, ugly and cruel all welded together into one thing (1997: webmaster@www.hkis.edu.hk).

According to Simkins in his 1998 paper entitled, 'The Metaphor of Myth in *To a God Unknown*: John Steinbeck and Joseph Campbell', the story told in *To a God Unknown* chronicles Steinbeck's interest in the American spirit of 'westering' and the illusory nature of the Edenic myth of America:

Coming from the Puritan faith in America as the New Jerusalem, 'the city on the hill', the American myth of moving west in search of a better life has brought inevitable consequences to the ecology, the native peoples, and the settlers themselves in pursuit of their nation's manifest destiny. Steinbeck's fiction, Louis Owens writes, holds 'the dangers of westering up to view and offer[s] in its place an ideal of commitment' (4). In *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck uses his knowledge of myth to bring various mythic elements together into an allegory about the consequences of westering, and told, largely, through the analogy of the spiritual quest of Joseph Wayne (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Simkins explains that Joseph's spiritual growth exemplifies Steinbeck's fusion of non-teleologism with his mythic interpretation of the flawed American Dream (a fusion with a political dimension becoming more evident in his later work). Joseph's journey to the West starts during the second stage of his life, after childhood and adolescence. This stage of life is in accordance with the Jungian hero's typical position, where he is already settled and would be trying to find a purpose in life beyond professional and even marital fulfilment. The reader of *To a God Unknown* meets Joseph as a young adult ready to embark upon a journey that has allegorical implications. He soon brings his brothers out to California and then marries and has a son. The young couple, together with their extended family, turn the wilderness into a productive ranch and it seems as if they have, at last, found their Eden (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>). Joseph, however, feels strangely insecure and restless after his father's death, and when he is questioned by his brother Thomas about the ear notchings which he nails to his oak tree, he explains that 'a man has to have something to tie to, something he can trust to be there in the morning' (Steinbeck, 1933: 39-40). The tree becomes a totem which represents his father – a kind of guardian spirit that will

help him to look after his land and intervene when things go wrong. As pointed out by Simkins, on one level the novel concerns Joseph's teleological search for 'something to tie to', something that he cannot seem to find in his family or his ranch:

In his metaphorical journey of self-discovery, he attempts to understand his land, to make it fruitful, and eventually to heal it. By analogy, Joseph Wayne's search for teleological explanations represents the psychological need of people in general, and Americans in particular, for teleologies of nationhood, myths and beliefs that can give a whole people 'something to tie to' (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Simkins quotes Campbell as saying that his book on mythology, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, which was published in 1949, seeks to render the story of 'the quest to find the inward thing that you basically are'. Simkins therefore reasons that, read allegorically, as Campbell read myth, *To a God Unknown* becomes Joseph's quest to find his unknown god, which, in fact is himself. He argues that the 'unknown' could probably not stand for sublimity, which would suggest the unknowable – not the unknown, and comes to the conclusion that the 'unknown' in question refers to that unknown part of the psyche that both Jung and Freud called the unconscious: the same area where Campbell's hero journeys metaphorically. The quest for identity is therefore a quest for a place less in society than within oneself, or as Campbell phrases it in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 'Man is that alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms'. According to Simkins, the place toward which the hero of myth journeys therefore symbolises the individual unconscious, as described in Campbell's book:

This fateful region ... may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty

mountain-top, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Simkins states that Steinbeck often associated the 'fateful region' that Campbell refers to, with a valley, as a symbol of a fallen Eden. Examples of such valleys are also to be found in *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Long Valley* (1938), *East of Eden* (1952) and others. Joseph, significantly, settles in the valley of Nuestra Señora which Steinbeck describes as if it were a 'fateful region'. When Juanito brings him a letter from Burton confirming the death of their father, he remarks: 'Since I have come, since the first day, I have known that this land is full of ghosts'. Joseph, however, immediately amends his own statement: 'No, that isn't right. Ghosts are weak shadows of reality. What lives here is more real than we are. We are like ghosts of its reality'. Juanito then tells him that the dead never go away, and he adds: 'My mother said how the earth is our mother, and how everything that lives has life from the mother and goes back to the mother' (1933: 27). Joseph and Juanito both have mythological sensibilities that may be seen to be rooted in the collective unconscious. Joseph's general mystical and mythical inclinations, on the one hand, accord with the Oriental (non-teleological) approach to life, but on the other, they often reveal his teleological thinking which prevents him from seeing things as they really are. In comparing people to the ghosts of the reality of that which resides in the fateful region of the valley, he reveals a deep understanding of Oriental principles as expressed in Yoga, as explained below. His teleological thinking, however, belies this knowledge which is only fully brought home to him when he is near death. In order to understand the nature of the object of Joseph Wayne's quest as personified by the unknown god, it is necessary to consult the mythologist Joseph Campbell, who possibly had an influence on Steinbeck's approach to the search for that unknown Entity, whom, according to the bible, resides within us.

Campbell, in one of the 'texts' containing his thoughts, entitled 'Tigers and Goats: Campbell Musing on Hinduism, Yoga and You', which is maintained on Internet by the Joseph Campbell Foundation, states that Yoga is the intentional bringing to rest of the continuous action of the mind. He explains that it was believed in ancient psychology that within the gross matter of the brain there is a very subtle substance which is in a state of continuous activity, like the rippling waves on a stirred pool. When you shut your eyes, the mind continues to operate in that way, making it almost impossible to hold fast to an image (for example, that of a loved one) in the mind. Other images associated with the loved one intrude, and the image changes to reveal other sequences, for the mind continues to move on spontaneously. Campbell states that Yoga, according to the sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras entitled *Guiding Thread to Yoga*, is the intentional stopping of the spontaneous activity of the mind stuff. In order to understand the state (of ultimate reality or Truth) to which Joseph of the novel hopes to 'break through' to, it is useful to consider Campbell's simile of water in a pond stirred by the wind. I believe that this simile may also serve to illustrate the principle applicable to the ghosts and the reality that Joseph refers to:

If you look at the surface of a pond [stirred by the wind] you will see many reflections ... [and] broken forms; nothing will be perfect, nothing complete; you will have only broken images before you. But if the wind dies down and the waters become perfectly still and clear, suddenly the whole perspective shifts ... and you are looking down through clear water to the lovely sandy bottom, and perhaps you will see fish in the water. The whole perspective changes and you behold, not a multitude of broken images, but a single, still, unmoving image (ramstrong@jfc.org).

Campbell explains that what we see around us are broken images of the perfect form of a divine reality, which appears to us only in broken images when our 'mind stuff' is in action. We are the broken images or reflections of a single divine perfection; but all that we ever see with our minds in the usual state of spontaneous activity, is the broken rainbow-reflection of this perfect image of divine light. When we realise that the broken images, including ourselves, are reflections of that one divine radiance, we are no longer at loss to know what they are because we have seen the source and know that the source is within all of these broken reflections, including ourselves.

In the novel, however, Joseph is often pictured as lending more credence to the ghosts or fractured images of natural events than to their source – which is the one divine radiance which is also to be found within all the broken reflections, including ourselves. Hence, the source is part of the essence of the reflections or ghosts, while the latter are particles or shards of light that collectively constitute divine radiance. The forces of yin and yang are inextricably intertwined to form a holy unit, or godhead, within the circle. Joseph tragically fails to see things as they really are and to use myth as a method to aid perception, as Juanito does in recounting his mother's explanation of the cycle of birth and death in which the earth mother plays a central and unifying role. Joseph refuses to believe the record of recurrent drought cycles in his new land and does not pay attention to the warnings of the natives of the area in this regard. Instead, he seeks metaphysical causes and cures for the drought, even blaming himself because he feels that he 'was appointed to care for the land, and ... failed' (1933: 188). After the death of his tree, he becomes desperate and is persuaded by Juanito to seek help from Father Angelo. However, he refuses to pray for his soul, and cries out angrily: 'To hell with my soul! I tell you the land is dying. Pray for the land!' (1933: 212). In 'banishing' his soul to 'hell', and seeing it as separate from the land, he is, by analogy, rejecting the divine principle within himself, which in Hinduism is termed the *Atman*, or true self. He therefore misses the opportunity to reconcile this divine essence within (which,

according to Campbell, is identical in all of us but is conceived of as an independent ego by individuals), with the divinity immanent in the universe, the Brahman, or divine power (ramstong@jfcorg.).

Ironically, Joseph does experience moments of non-teleological insight when he is able to look dispassionately at reality and to deal with it realistically as he did when he encountered the wild boar eating its own offspring. These instances, however, only serve to emphasise the tragedy that while he is able to see and act in accordance with reality, he too often takes his mythic sensibilities literally. For example, when he returns to the valley after he has recorded his homestead, he is overcome with the beauty of his land and fears that he may be suffering from delirium and fever: 'The fear came upon him that this land might be the figure of a dream which would dissolve into a dry and dusty morning' (1933: 11). Simkins points out that Steinbeck 'plays with this superstition, often suggesting something beyond reality, but always explaining it in natural terms' (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>). According to Simkins, Joseph's insistent denial of the realities of nature is important because it clearly undercuts the validity of his nature worship. Another example of Joseph's imaginative powers and his inclination to attach supernatural meanings to natural phenomena is found in the scene where he rides towards the ranch with his new bride and watches the shapes made by clouds rising from the ocean:

A black cloud sailed in from the ocean and rested on the ridge, and Joseph's thought made it a black goat's head. He could see the yellow, slanting eyes, wise and ironic, and the curved horns. He thought, 'I know that it is really there, the goat resting his chin on a mountain range and staring in on the valley. He should be there. Something I've read or something I've been told makes it a fitting thing that a goat should come out of the ocean'. He was endowed with the power to

create things as substantial as the earth. 'If I will admit the goat is there, it will be there. And I will have made it. This goat is important', he thought (1933: 74).

Simkins refers to the image of the goat as yet another example of Joseph taking his mythic sensibilities too literally, but Steinbeck obviously also uses his main character's talent for myth-making to lend poignancy to certain scenes, or to add a dramatic touch or a sense of impending doom to others – thereby creating 'atmosphere' in the same way that music is used in the cinema. In spite of his protagonist's conscious and somewhat contrived projection of his mythically-inclined imagination on the natural world, Steinbeck nevertheless succeeds in creating a chilling atmosphere charged with the evil presence of a goat-like interloper who looks down, knowingly, with 'slanting eyes, wise and ironic', upon the peaceful valley below, where Benjy is about to be stabbed to death by Juanito. It is a tribute to Steinbeck's writing skills that he is able to convey Joseph's almost frantic search for teleological explanations by means of myth-making in order to satisfy his psychological need for understanding, while simultaneously conveying the presence of an undercurrent of mysticism, suspense and foreboding. The fact that Joseph consciously 'creates' the image of the goat and shortly afterwards has to 'maintain' it to himself and resolve not to 'betray the goat by disbelieving in it', is all the more ironic in the light of his privately-felt contempt for Burton's religious faith, which he obviously finds to be extreme and distasteful. Joseph's own, almost religious, faith in what he imagines he sees is, according to Simkins, an even larger metaphysics than Burton's and no less suspect:

If Joseph Wayne realizes his mistake, this occurs only at the end of the novel, after he sacrifices himself to save the land. As Campbell described them, myths as metaphors only help people find their own being, their own nature. For example, those who take Christ's ascension literally, base their faith on a physical impossibility, and by actually placing heaven out somewhere in the universe,

according to Campbell, they miss the point that the kingdom of heaven is within us (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Joseph finds a particularly sacred place in the temple-like glade which is situated on his ranch within the 'fateful region' of the valley of Nuestra Señora. Juanito shows him this place which has been sacred to his Amerindian ancestors for a long time:

They had come to an open glade, nearly circular, and as flat as a pool. The dark trees grew about it, straight as pillars and jealously close together. In the center of the clearing stood a rock as big as a house, mysterious and huge. It seemed to be shaped, cunningly and wisely, and yet there was no shape in memory to match it. A short, heavy green moss covered the rock with soft pile. The edifice was something like an altar that had run down over itself. In one side of the rock there was a small black cave fringed with five-fingered ferns, and from the cave a little stream flowed silently and crossed the glade and disappeared into the tangled brush that edged the clearing (1933: 41).

The glade seems to have been designed with an eye to Chinese landscape-scale practice, called *feng shui*. The natural elements express harmony between positive and negative, yin and yang forces contained within the circle of pines that signifies the essential unity of all things. Examples of these elements in the glade include the dominant, solid edifice of the rock and the compliant water, light and shade, movement (of water and wind-blown leaves) and stillness, sound and silence, tangled brush that edges the clearing and tall pine trees that, according to Elizabeth, would have been more at home in Monterey. The 'foreign' pine trees are dear to Elizabeth because they remind her of her childhood in Monterey and the ocean which she yearns for. They may also suggest that 'foreign elements', as represented by the settlers from the eastern regions of America, have the potential to thrive and grow to prominence in their new

home as the pines have in theirs. Like the pines that serve as sentinels jealously guarding the grove, so the new inhabitants may also grow to love their land and become protective of their new-found natural heritage. The grove serves as an ideal mythological focal point and is regarded as sacred by both Joseph and Juanito. Joseph believes that its water, which is used for medicine by the Indians, comes from the centre of the earth, and the grove can therefore also be seen as an *omphalos*, or world navel. According to Paul Devereux in *Secrets of Ancient and Sacred Places*, the concept of the *omphalos* as world navel is central to geomancy, or 'sacred geography', in which the fusion of mind and land is a principal idea (1992: 18). The *omphalos* is therefore, simultaneously, a physical and mental location and a place where the inner nature of humanity and the outer face of nature meet. At places such as Glastonbury (believed by some to be, possibly, the site of Camelot), the *omphalos* has been associated, in modern times, with 'some form of collective memory' (1992: 18). According to Devereux, the navel in the human body records the point of origin and sustenance, and so it is symbolically at the foundation point of a building, city or holy site. It is usually marked by a stone but sometimes by a post, tree or pit. The standard, classic example of an *omphalos* is at Delphi, in Greece, and other famous examples include Mecca's sacred Ka'aba stone and the naval stone of Jerusalem, which was considered to be at the centre of the world in earlier times (Devereux, 1992: 17-18). There are also several examples of such sites to be found throughout the Americas.

Like the Delphic Oracle, the grove in *To a God Unknown* is also a source of arcane knowledge, insight, prophecy, and deeper understanding, as expressed in visions, dreams and intuitions. These, typically, need to be interpreted by a shaman who understands the messages from the spirit world, or, in this case, by a sensitive recipient who is attuned to the spirit of the land and who is able to interpret the dream-like thoughts from the collective unconscious that the rock seems to evoke. Joseph as well as Elizabeth experience a feeling of *déjà vu* in the grove and both are aware of some

kind of mystical communion with the spirit world in the presence of the rock. Joseph, however, seems to be unable to interpret the mythical messages because of his reliance on teleological thinking and his inability to comprehend fully the unity of all things. He reminds one of Elizabeth's father, who tells Joseph: 'I know in my head how to be strong, but I can't learn to do it' (1933: 64). Joseph, in turn, seems to be sensitive to his own mythological intuitions, but in a quandary as how to respond to them. For example, he seeks metaphysical instead of practical causes and cures for natural effects such as the drought. Elizabeth, on the other hand, seems to be unable to get to know herself and prays for the ability 'to learn what kind of thing I am' (1933: 63). Initially her mythological sensitivities are limited to knowledge about the outward forms of ancient Greek allegories which she uses as a kind of social grace, but she soon grows in wisdom on the ranch – significantly after she falls pregnant. When she sets out to visit the grove on her own, she has the opportunity to become attuned to the arcane nature of the rock which belongs to her new world. This is especially important to her as she is expecting a child and now has the opportunity to understand the symbolic meaning of the rock as earth mother, but also her own elevated role on the ranch and in the mythical scheme of things. In spite of her new-found wisdom, she has not yet succeeded in bonding with 'the other', childlike Elizabeth, whom she had left waiting on the other side of the mountain pass when she first came to live on the ranch. Hence, in a Jungian sense, she is divided against herself and is therefore unable to understand herself or her husband, who, according to Indian mythology as well as Hindu marriage rites, is supposed to be a god to her. Nevertheless, she sometimes unconsciously pictures him as a god, and at her wedding, for example, she finds herself praying to his image in her mind. Joseph is also partially responsible for his wife's inability to understand him because he cannot, for example, bring himself to tell her about his innermost feelings about their marriage when they first enter the mountain pass on their way to their new home in the 'fateful zone' represented by the valley. She, in turn, deals almost facetiously with the Greek 'stories' that she tells him without being able to point

out the deeper meaning of the myths. Their mutual lack of the ability to communicate on a higher level thus prevents the perfect fusion of opposites, male and female, that is so essential in arriving at the concept of wholeness in Oriental mythology. Elizabeth is also prevented from accepting her new role (in California, or the new Eden) by her immature attachment to her painful, but now idealised, childhood and by her fear of change. This new role includes responsibilities as a liberated adult, mother and ancestor of the new breed or nation (as referred to in the epigraph to this chapter) that is to populate California and, in the ultimate analysis of the metaphor, America and the world. She is unable to love the new land like her husband does, and, as Joseph tells his brother Burton, "This is a wild country. If you do not love it, there is only hatred left" (1933: 143). An aspect of the glade that is central to the theme of *To a God Unknown*, is that it encloses the secret opening in the body of the earth mother from which life-giving water issues. Juanito tells Joseph that his mother, when she was pregnant, brought him along when she visited the grove to sit beside the rock. Elizabeth also sits beside the rock and falls into a trance-induced dream filled with Jungian imagery, including allusions to her childhood in Monterey as well as religious symbolism and vivid pictures of the convulsions of clashing waves and her unborn child. She experiences a strange longing for death and, at last, a wish for knowledge of her husband. However, the initial dream-like sense of peace that she finds at 'this dear good thing' soon gives way to fear when the rock turns into a shaggy, threatening goat in her mind. This reminds one of the leering goat which Joseph imagined looking down upon the valley when he first brought Elizabeth to the ranch. The goat is, once again, the harbinger of death – in this case Elizabeth's. When Joseph, Thomas and Juanito first visit the grove, they find a strange black bull, reminiscent of the Grecian myths, lying down beside the stream. This symbol of male virility at an essentially feminine shrine, is one more intimation of the mythological importance of this strange place where opposite elements are brought together within a circle. Every element seems to have a secret meaning which reminds one of the symbols in the ancient Chinese Book of Changes, or *I'Ching*, which are open

to different interpretations, in accordance with different circumstances. The black bull may therefore well be a symbol of the ultimate earthly nemesis, death, which awaits Joseph (in the role of the Greek mythological hero) in the (Jungian) fateful region of the grove. Messiah-like, Joseph lays down his own life on the altar, and (in mythological terms) restores life to his dying land by shedding his own blood after his sacrifice of an emaciated calf proves to be inadequate. The methods used by the old hermit are therefore seen to be applicable only to his own needs, and Joseph must find his own way and his own 'acceptable sacrifice' (which turns out to be himself) in order to complete his quest. Physical death, however, is only a re-birth into a new cycle, releasing the hero from the restraints of an earthly body to continue his quest as a giant in a cosmic landscape. The symbol of the bull can also be explored in terms of the Greek minotaur, half human and half bull, which lives in a maze reminiscent of the grove, and is eventually killed by Theseus, son of king Aegeus – who goes on to pursue his quests, having overcome what was intended to be his nemesis. As suggested before, an Oriental approach to mythology would leave open several ways in which such a symbol could be interpreted, including the classic Greek metaphor.

On a different level, the grove containing the rock that marks the site of the *omphalos* within the 'fateful region' of the valley of our Lady, may well be seen to stand for the centre of California, the new, still virginal land in the novel. However, in the light of the following extract from Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, it may also be seen as representing the *omphalos* of the United States of America – or for that matter, of the world, and even of the cosmos itself:

The whole is necessarily everything, the world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective, life and death, macrocosm and microcosm ... conscious and unconscious, subject and object (1941: 178).

The dissolution of Joseph's physical life as well as the deterioration of the land which, to him, seems to be final, starts with the girdling of the oak tree, which now no longer embodies the protective spirit of his father, who is also pictured as some kind of god in the novel. While it was alive, the tree was a living totem with its roots thrusting into the earth mother, who, earlier on, had also briefly been Joseph's mistress when he first took possession of his land. When he first comes under the spell of the feminine beauty of the land, Joseph is afraid that the land might possess him. To counter this, he envisions the arrival of his father's spirit which then merges with the feminized landscape by entering the oak tree. Simkins explains that, according to Campbell, the hero mythically joining both goddess and god, becomes one with the cosmos. He is then part of the whole as described above by Steinbeck in the excerpt from *Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941: 178). According to Simkins, both Campbell and Steinbeck subscribe to a continuity and contiguity of life:

'Wherever the hero may wander', Campbell writes, 'whatever he may do, he is ever in the presence of his own essence – for he has *the perfected eye to see* [my emphasis]. There is no separateness'. The hero myth illustrates unity insofar as the unconscious may be explored by consciousness because metaphysically the earthly and sublime realms are also one (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Hence, as quoted from Steinbeck's letter to Sheffield in the epigraph to this chapter, Joseph has become 'a giant shouldering his way among the ages, pushing the stars aside to make a passage to god' (Benson, 1984: 260). The implication seems to be that others will follow in Joseph's footsteps and come to understand the essential unity of all things. The 'new eye' has thus been opened in the west – the 'transparent eyeball' as described in the book *Nature* by Emerson, which serves as a symbol of the mystical

unity between man and nature, as also referred to by Kami in his aforementioned paper (<http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/steinbec/abstract.html>). Emerson writes:

Nature says ... he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Standing on the bare ground ... my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space ... all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God (<http://www.geocities.com/~freereligion/1emerson.html>).

Steinbeck could not have foreseen, in 1933 when his novel appeared, that Monterey County which extends almost a hundred miles south of Monterey Bay, would one day become known as 'Steinbeck Country' – as surely as Hannibal, Missouri, had become 'Mark Twain Country'. In this sense, Steinbeck has also been recognised as a 'giant', and like Joseph, he can be seen to have created 'a passage to god' by making people aware of the essential unity and holiness of all things in nature, including themselves. On a more practical level, it is doubtful whether the scenic beauty and the diversity of species in the Monterey Bay area could have survived the onslaught of commerce and tourism as well as they have, were it not for the association of icons such as Ricketts and Steinbeck with this area. Steinbeck, in his time, however, witnessed some of the less savoury 'improvements' that man had visited upon that part of the world which was pristine country not too long before the birth of his character, Joseph. He was probably also aware of the writings of early 'visionaries' and their prospects for the spread of bland 'development' to tame the wilderness so dreaded by 'civilised people'. One of them was Lansford W. Hastings who had visited California and Oregon in the late

nineteenth century and who had thrilled thousands of prospective settlers with his glowing picture of the wild places being tamed by the hardy pioneer. Unfortunately, his vision as recounted hereunder by Harlan Hague in an article which first appeared in *The American West* of May/June 1977, has almost come true in the finest detail:

In view of their increasing population, accumulating wealth, and growing prosperity, I can not but believe, that the time is not distant when those wild forests, trackless plains, untrodden valleys and the unbounded ocean, will present one grand scene, of continuous improvements, universal enterprise, and unparalleled commerce: when those vast forests, shall have disappeared, before the hardy pioneer; those extensive plains, shall abound with innumerable herds, of domestic animals; those fertile valleys, shall groan to the immense weight of their abundant products: when those numerous rivers shall team [sic] with countless steam-boats, steam-ships, ships, barques and brigs; when the entire country will be everywhere intersected, with turnpike roads, rail-roads and canals; and when, all the vastly numerous, and rich resources, of that now, almost unknown region, will be fully and advantageously developed (http://softadventure.net/eden_ravished.htm).

According to Hague, the typical trans-Mississippi emigrant in the last half of the nineteenth century accepted the assumption of inexhaustible resources, but this view had proven false long before the post-Civil War exodus. For example, commercial hunting of the sea otter along the Californian coast virtually wiped out the species, and the fate of the beaver was similar.

Hague reports that an early American ambassador to Italy, George Perkins Marsh, warned in his book, *Man and Nature*, that the earth was given to man for usufruct alone, and not for consumption. He also theorised that ancient Rome's fall could be traced to

the depletion of the empire's forests, and predicted a like fate for the United States if its resources were similarly squandered. Hague also points out that the land was viewed by the indigenous Indian people as much more than a means of livelihood for the current generation. It belonged not only to them, the living, but to all generations of their people, those who came before and those who would come after. They could not separate themselves from the land – although there were exceptions. Some Indians fell under the spell of the white trader who offered them goods that would make their lives easier, if not better. The Indian attitude toward the land did not necessarily change, according to Hague, although some of them adopted the white man's view:

To European-Americans, the western Indians' use of land was just proof of their savagery. The pioneers had listened to the preachers of Manifest Destiny, and they knew that the nomadic tribes must stand aside for God's Chosen People who would use the land as God intended ... And so they returned to Eden ... (http://softadventure.net/eden_ravished.htm).

In contrast to the consumer mentality revealed by the majority of early 'developers' in California, Hague points out that Henry Nash Smith, in his influential *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, reminded his countrymen that the resources of the West were not inexhaustible and that the character of the American empire was unique:

The character of the American empire was defined not by streams of influence out of the past, not by a cultural tradition, nor by its place in a world community, but by a relation between man and nature – or rather, even more narrowly, between American man and the American West. This relation was thought of as unvaryingly fortunate (http://softadventure.net/eden_ravished.htm).

As Steinbeck believed in the perfectibility of man, he would have seen such a relationship between man and nature that Smith describes as having been a determining factor in the formation of the American empire, as a desideratum for future generations to pursue. Such a man, like Joseph in a moment of non-teleological clarity, would also feel that his nature accords with the nature of the land.

The foregoing passages give some indication of the well-known pattern of exploitation that follows colonisation of virgin land the world over. But nature is able to play an even more destructive role without the aid of mankind. Part of Steinbeck's 'message' in *To a God Unknown* is contained in the scene where Joseph Wayne lies half-asleep, looking down at his slouched body and imagining its features as representing the mountains, hills, valleys and rivers of the world:

High up on a tremendous peak, towering over the ranges and the valleys, the brain of the world was set, and the eyes that looked down on the earth's body. The brain could not understand the life on its body. It lay inert, knowing vaguely that it could shake off the life, the towns, the little houses of the fields with earthquake fury ... And thus it stood a million years unchanging and quiet ... The world brain sorrowed a little, for it knew that some time it would have to move, and then the life would be shaken and destroyed and the long work of tillage would be gone, and the houses in the valleys would crumble. The brain was sorry, but it could change nothing. It thought, 'I will endure even a little discomfort to preserve this order which has come to exist by accident. It will be a shame to destroy this order'. But the towering earth was tired of sitting in one position. It moved, suddenly, and the houses crumbled, the mountains heaved horribly, and all the work of a million years was lost (1933: 165).

The earthquake that probably gave rise to this description, actually took place early in the new century that marked California's emergence as the new hub of development in the United States. On the morning of April 18, 1906, an earthquake shook the proud city of San Francisco for two full minutes and the aftershocks and fires that followed left 500 San Franciscans dead, while more than 28 000 buildings – more than a third of the homes, offices and shops in the entire city, were destroyed. The effect of the earthquake was felt in every city from San Juan Batista to the coast at Mendocino, and although the cities were rebuilt, no one could pretend that California's bountiful treasures could make the State or its residents somehow immune to the equally destructive forces of nature (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/cbturn.html>).

It would therefore seem that there is very little that an individual can do to change the patterns of human nature or the vicissitudes visited upon the world by nature. It remains for each individual to walk in his own light, which may or may not lead him to the point where he realises that he is 'a part or particle of God', to quote Emerson. But this is not a goal that can, or even should, be instilled in the masses. Non-teleology implies random diversity and, as in nature, a place is also assured for discord and/or destructiveness in the grand scheme of the universe. Hence, mankind too is bound to reflect diversity as well as good and evil, and this is recognised in the Indian caste system, which is based on reincarnation that allows each individual the opportunity to attain 'perfection' in the course of many incarnations. The four sons in *To a God Unknown* represent, according to French, 'man's possible conditions' in facing the difficulties of life:

Since the family has trouble getting along both in rocky Vermont and drought-stricken California, it is easy to interpret the sons and what becomes of them as an allegory of the possibilities of the survival of various types of men in the face of the vicissitudes of nature. Two of these sons, recalling the figures on the cup

of gold in Steinbeck's first novel, represent the extremes of physical man; the other two, the extremes of spiritual man. In short, the group personifies body and soul, doubly dichotomised (1961: 48).

Hence, according to French, there will always be the likes of Benjy representing purely carnal man; men such as Thomas (the back-to-nature types) who are animalistic but also completely reliable, if unsentimental, when danger threatens; narrow, bigoted and destructive religious fanatics such as Burton, who survive, but in a state 'worse than death'; and finally, people like Joseph, who symbolise 'the fecund, fructifying aspect of spiritual man' (1961: 48-49).

Recognition of the ultimate unity of all things, according to Simkins, reveals that man has 'no separate destinations to reach, no final event to await, no distinct end to achieve (that is, separate from any we create for ourselves), since all is part of the whole'. Simkins points out that, led by Ed Ricketts to consider the philosophical ramifications of non-teleology, Steinbeck promotes a point of view similar to Campbell's in *To a God Unknown* and in most of his work in the 1930s:

More than simply *laissez-faire* metaphysics, non-teleologism supposes that events are neither directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose. It acknowledges randomness of existence. To view life teleologically, invites frustration, misapprehension, and depression when goals go unreached, expectations remain unfulfilled, and when others do not share the same teleological vision (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>).

Joseph Wayne refuses to accept the drought as a non-teleological condition that cannot be changed. He insists on finding some metaphysical or moral cause which may then be corrected by metaphysical means. According to Steinbeck in *Log from the Sea of*

Cortez, non-teleological thinkers consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than as results; conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all-important prerequisite: 'Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually is – attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what and how, instead of why' (1941: 160).

As pointed out before, Joseph tragically senses the non-causality of life at key points throughout the novel – as he does when he realises that life lives on life. Campbell, as quoted by Simkins, comments that without this continual sacrifice there would be no life whatsoever on earth:

There is a renewing principle everywhere operative that is of the nature of the earth and of the mystery of the womb, which receives seed and returns it as renewed life ... The individual is thereby united with the way of nature, centred not in self-preservation but in accord with the wonder of the whole (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>).

Campbell and Steinbeck believed that myth helped people to break through the illusion of teleological thinking to a non-teleological acceptance of life. Such an acceptance also takes cognisance of the essential unity of all things. According to Simkins, Joseph Wayne, a teleological man with mythic sensibilities, searches vainly to fulfil his potential because he realises too late the unity of existence and its non-teleological nature. Simkins points out that Campbell always insisted on the need for myth in modern life to cope with the recesses of human consciousness, and that he laid the shamanistic duty of interpreting myth on the artist, 'the one who communicates myth for today'. But, according to Campbell, such a person has to be 'an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn't simply a sociologist with a plan for you'. Simkins states that

Campbell probably had in his mind his personal literary gurus, James Joyce and Thomas Mann, but that he also saw promise in the young Steinbeck when he wrote the following remark in his journal in 1932:

Joh[n] has a fine, deep, living quality about his work which ought to ring a bell, I think – if his work is ever discovered (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth5.html>).



Carlton Sheffield
("Dook")



Carl Wilhelmson



Mary Steinbeck



Katherine Beswick



Frank Fenton

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS: CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS INTRINSIC TO STEINBECK'S FICTION AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF HIS WORK, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HIS NOVEL, *TO A GOD UNKNOWN*

Literature was not promulgated by a pale and emasculated critical priesthood singing their litanies in empty churches – nor is it a game for the cloistered elect, the tinhorn mendicants of low calorie despair. Literature is as old as speech. It grew out of human need for it, and has not changed except to become more needed. The skalds, the bards, the writers are not separate and exclusive. From the beginning, their functions, their duties, their responsibilities have been decreed by our species ... The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement. Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally-flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature.

Excerpt from Steinbeck's 1962 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.

Steinbeck's vast canon reflects a remarkable diversity of subject matter, format and style that is indicative of his versatility as a writer but which, ironically, also caused critics like Kazan to criticize him severely for 'not growing' when his last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, appeared in 1961. Although he usually pretended not to notice the sometimes scathing attacks against him by certain critics, the words from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech quoted above reflect some of the accumulated hurt and anger that he felt at the glee with which some critics continually 'reminded' him that he would never be a worthy recipient of such an august honour. As noted by Benson, 'the only kind of growth that would have been acceptable was if he produced some kind of "super" *Grapes of Wrath*' (1984: 898). Some of the evidence provided below, however, proves that Steinbeck did indeed grow, and the extent of that growth is reflected in his continuing influence on the international literary and

artistic scene as well as in the many 'monuments' that have posthumously been erected to his memory. Before examining the effect of the three characteristic 'Steinbeck elements' on the reception of his work, it is deemed necessary to take a brief look at Steinbeck's legacy to the world of literature and his impact on the literary and artistic scene of today. This may well lend much-needed perspective to a view of Steinbeck and his work which has been, and still too often is, distorted when undue credence is given to the opinions of sometimes impercipient critics.

To the uninitiated, his first book, if judged by its rather garishly-illustrated cover, could (and according to Benson, did, when it first appeared) pass for a slightly risqué pirate story for boys, while his last (unfinished) work is a scholarly rendition of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (Benson, 1984: 161). And between these two poles lies a world of serious as well as comedic fiction and non-fiction, including novels and short stories, plays and film scripts, war propaganda and correspondence, journalism and travelogues, philosophy, an insightful and deeply philosophical commentary on America and Americans, as well as posthumously published letters, journals of novels, and a host of other assorted 'pieces', as Steinbeck called them. Steinbeck's work transcends international boundaries as witnessed by a thriving Steinbeck Society of Japan which, in collaboration with the Steinbeck Research Centre at San Jose State University, the Cannery Row Foundation, the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the city of Monterey, presented the Fourth International Steinbeck Conference in March 1997. This event was preceded by several conferences which started off with the first literary conference on *The Grapes of Wrath* held at the University of Connecticut in May 1969 (a year after the author's death) and the 1970 Steinbeck conference held in Corvallis, Oregon, under the dual sponsorship of the Oregon State and Ball State universities. Many other institutions and associations as well as individuals are presently involved in promoting Steinbeck studies, as witnessed by the plethora of Steinbeck sites on the Internet. The National Steinbeck Centre at Salinas, California, for example, is 'dedicated to unifying the diversity of the spirit that flows through Steinbeck country, carrying his vibrancy and literary genius into the 21st century and beyond' (<http://www.steinbeck.org/>). The Centre hosts more than a hundred-thousand visitors each year and maintains an interactive Internet web site

that keeps enthusiasts and scholars abreast with the latest activities and news. The year 2002 will mark Steinbeck's centennial anniversary, and a major international conference is being planned by various organisations to celebrate this occasion.

Steinbeck's work is eclectic and continues to find expression in contemporary art forms, as illustrated in the few examples that follow. In 1995 the pop singer Bruce Springsteen produced an album entitled *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, in obvious reference to Steinbeck's character from *The Grapes of Wrath*. The title track is a social commentary on conditions in America, where the Tom Joads of today can still be found, in the words of the song, 'sleepin' in their cars in the south-west [with] no home, no job, no rest'. In 1996 an adaptation of *To a God Unknown* made its world premier as a play produced by Theatrix in New York. The play's director, Andrew Hayes, remarked that the novel was not very hard to transfer to theatrical script because of Steinbeck's visual style of writing. This reminds one that the novel was first conceived of as a play when it was still called 'The Green Lady'. The Cleveland Opera premiere of Carlisle Floyd's classic American opera *Of Mice and Men* is the highlight of the company's 1998-99 season (<http://www.clevelandopera.org/mice-n-men.html>). It is furthermore interesting to note that no less than twenty-nine Academy Award nominations and four Academy Awards were presented for screen adaptations of Steinbeck's stories (<http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/steinbec/srcnon.html>).

Steinbeck's versatility may also be indicative of his scientific and non-teleological (some might say, indiscriminate) interest in all the myriad life-forms to be found teeming in the great tide-pool of life and of his need to 'capture', study and 'conserve' them in different (literary) forms. Witnessing the seemingly meaningless cycles of birth, procreation and death in this 'pool of the world' prompted him to look for a deeper meaning behind what Campbell called 'the mystery of the womb, which receives seed and returns it as renewed life'. Like Campbell, Steinbeck found allegory/myth to be the only means whereby he could break through the illusion of an unsatisfactory teleological 'explanation' to a non-teleological understanding and acceptance of life in which the individual is, according to Campbell, 'united with the way of nature, centered not in self-preservation but in accord with the wonder of the

whole' (<http://ocean.st.usm.edu/~wsimkins/myth.html>). Steinbeck's constant awe at 'the wonder of the whole' can also be seen as the essence of his 'religion', which he never formulated in exact terms but hinted at in his essay about the phalanx phenomenon.

During the thirties, Steinbeck's critics portrayed him as a California regionalist, a minor writer with some distinction, but who would fail to achieve greatness due to his so-called major artistic flaws. There were, however, others who believed that his fiction would make a great contribution to American literature. The debate surrounding Steinbeck's artistic merit was marked by contradictory critical reactions to identical phenomena in his work and centred mainly on ethical and sociological, instead of aesthetic issues. The perceived 'flaws' included his purported indecency, vulgarity and sexual licence – accusations that have been dealt with earlier on in this dissertation and which are hardly relevant, even when applied to earlier times. He was furthermore blamed for his populist approach and for his propaganda, and was even branded as a communist for siding with the poorest of the workers, the sharecroppers, as in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The critics were now coming closer to the mark, but his sympathies were hardly surprising – given his own values, as reflected in his early Bohemian poverty and his natural acceptance and defence of people whose labour and bread he often shared. In later, more mature years, he may also have shared in the ingrained prejudices of his culture and his generation – for example, in his patriotic approach to the Vietnam war – but he was never afraid of going further than his peers in condemning injustices and bigotry, especially when fascism was involved. Ironically, he was now also blamed by his Russian counterparts, who earlier on viewed him as a 'comrade-in-arms' and by the American ultra-left for not coming to the defence of the communist-backed North Vietnamese forces. Steinbeck had, of course, never been a communist in the first place, but his *The Grapes of Wrath* was seized upon by the communists as an indictment against the 'morally corrupt', 'capitalist' American government and as proof of the author's 'radical' convictions. His powerful affections and his inclination to 'stand up for the underdog', sharecropper or soldier in Vietnam, were often given political meanings that were never there in the first place. This caused him to be in actual physical

danger at times, and made him, for example, the subject of Senator McCarthy's investigations for 'un-American' activities (Benson, 1984: 744-748). Criticism of this nature is not deemed to be applicable to Steinbeck's artistic merit and can be dealt with almost on the same level as the puerile view that his work is easy to read and therefore devoid of 'deeper meaning'. Unfortunately, such opinions had been loudly voiced by critics of high standing at the time, and so have negatively impinged on Steinbeck's *image* as a serious artist deserving of the highest recognition, and they continued to cast a shadow on his achievements for some time after he had received the Nobel Prize. These criticisms did not, however, in any way diminish his popularity with his many readers in the English-speaking world, and also on the Continent and in the Far East, where his books continue to be read. This 'popularity', in itself, casts aspersions on his artistic integrity – but his readers proved to be more astute than the critics deigned to give them credit for. They sensed his even-handedness in dealing with wrongs on both sides and did not fail to fathom at least part of the depths that lay hidden beneath the smooth surfaces of his narratives.

Criticisms that have a bearing upon allegory/myth, non-teleological thinking and Steinbeck's version of religion, however, fall within the ambit of the field of investigation of this dissertation and shall therefore be dealt with in more detail, especially in the context of *To a God Unknown*. Firstly, there is the issue of his conflation of imagery and allusions that derive from the myths and allegories of many cultures, including ancient Greece and the Orient. French, for example, slates *To a God Unknown* as an 'overwrought allegory in which Steinbeck fails – as he does again in *East of Eden* – to fuse effectively realistic and symbolic elements' (1961: 47). As previously pointed out, this view may have validity, especially if one does not take cognisance of the Oriental aspect of Transcendentalist influence in the novel. In *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck does tend to overload the canvas of his rich Californian landscape (which is already peopled with strange biblical characters) by adding nuances of Oriental and classical myths and mysticism as well as hints of a variety of other influences. These include elements of the grail legend as well as of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Apart from being an obvious type of the biblical Joseph, Joseph Wayne of the novel may, according to Fontenrose, be seen as the Fisher

King of the grail legend. The name Joseph may also have reference to Joseph of Arimathea, receiver of the grail and ancestor or brother-in-law of the Fisher King. Yet, in the grail legend, it was not the Fisher King's death but his recovery that restored life to the wasteland. Fontenrose points out that Steinbeck seems to have had in mind not so much the Fisher King himself, as his pagan antecedents, the myths and rituals of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Joseph is therefore a Frazerian divine king who must die because he has lost his potency:

Joseph is therefore the dying king whose death renews the land, rather than the dying god whose resurrection restores life (though the god may be derived from the king). The story follows the life history of the god-king, a ritual sequence rather than a myth – it matters little that there is no evidence for 'the king must die', since Steinbeck simply used the Frazerian construction for his own purpose (Fontenrose, 1963: 15-16).

It is issues such as these that tend to confuse even the careful reader who is fully aware of the wealth of meaning that is to be found beneath Steinbeck's deceptively easy-to-read narrative. Being aware of the Oriental influence in his work, however, makes it easier to accept and understand the apparent philosophical and metaphorical anomalies which cause Champney, for example, to state that Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking is basically 'a mixture of philosophical relativism, the refusal of the scientist to be dogmatic about a hypothesis, and moral fatalism (Tedlock and Wicker, 1975: 150-151). According to Champney though, Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking leads to nothing creative or productive based on a vision on what might be: 'It adopts the Oriental passivism which discourages man from doing very much about his plight, stifles thought and leads to an objectivity search which ends in pure mysticism' (Tedlock and Wicker, 1957: 151). Unlike many other critics, Champney at least understands Steinbeck's approach as well as the philosophical relationships between *Log from the Sea of Cortez* and Steinbeck's works of fiction, but his restatement of it in his criticism is in negative terms. What Champney seems to miss is that non-teleological thinkers consider the conscious acceptance of things as they are as a desideratum – a state of mind that needs to be

cultivated in order to enable man to play a positive part in the dynamics of the universe. In contrast to Champney, Campbell explains the role of non-teleological man in the universe in positive terms. He portrays him as someone who has the power of creativity and who is not afraid of life's hurts. The person who has a teleological approach to life, on the other hand, tends to be overly concerned about the hurtfulness of life and is therefore out of touch with the creative principle and dynamics of the world. In the non-teleological view, man is at one with the whole which cannot be seen to have a central or divine purpose:

The notion of the universe in Indian thought is that it is a great organism, manifesting this divine dance, or this divine dream, in a harmonious, magnificent display. And every one of us is a part of that organism. Every one of us has a role to play in it. In their sacred books the Indians commonly represent this cosmic organism as a Great Man, with each class of humanity compared to a part [of the man] (mythreb@mcs.com).

However, I believe that unlike Campbell, Steinbeck could not quite come to accept the evidence of the apparently different (and sometimes, seemingly discrete) purposes of existence as proof that life cannot be said to have a central purpose. He may have agreed with Campbell that each incarnation has a potentiality, and that it is the mission of life to live that potentiality – but I am convinced that Steinbeck continued to seek the mystical meaning that may be found behind the need for a re-creation of each new incarnation. He saw the idea of the phalanx as offering a possible solution to Boodin's concept of an impersonal God as a controlling principle in his efforts to reconcile science, particularly evolutionary theory and scientific methodology, with humane values. While Boodin described his concept of the 'God unknown' as a 'controlling principle' or as a 'cosmic idealism' in which matter responds to the control of form which coexists with matter, Steinbeck spoke of 'the creator beast, the phalanx' (Benson, 1984: 267-269). Steinbeck was obviously aware of the inadequacy of his efforts at finding a metaphysical term to 'clothe' the 'naked thing' that Joseph of *To a God Unknown* speaks about in the context of the old hermit's attempt to 'make a symbol of the sun's death'. Like Joseph, Steinbeck also

seemed to realise that 'the thing is ridiculous in clothes' (1933: 182). He experienced this inadequacy in formulating his 'religion' as 'a tremendous and terrible poetry' that he was unable to write, and stated that 'I am experiencing an emotional vastness in working this out. The difficulty of writing the poetry is so great that I am not even contemplating it until I have absorbed and made part of my body the thesis as a whole' (Benson, 1984: 855). Although Joseph, when he is at the point of death, metaphorically finds the 'God unknown' within himself as part of 'the whole', I am not entirely sure that Steinbeck was convinced by this solution. Steinbeck, the writer knight, up to the very end continued his quest in pursuit of the grail in the form of 'the one book at which all of [his] life [had] been aimed at', namely his rendition of the *Morte d'Arthur* (Benson, 1984: 844). This can be seen as an extension of Joseph's quest because Steinbeck believed that 'the so-called adult Western [novel] is blood brother to the Arthurian cycle' (Benson, 1984: 838). After all, the Grail Quest is, in the last analysis, a search for God, or at the very least, a search for a link with the 'God unknown', or a search for perfection. As expressed in a letter to Professor Eugène Vinaver on 28 September 1959, Steinbeck felt incapable of capturing the greatness of the *Morte d'Arthur*, and hence, his quest, like Lancelot's before him, failed:

This perplexity is like a great ache to me. You see a writer – like a knight – must aim at perfection, and failing, not fall back on the cushion that there is no perfection. He must believe himself capable of perfection even when he fails. And that is probably why it is the loneliest profession in the world and the most lost (1975: 649).

In an earlier letter to Vinaver dated November 1954, he refers to his inability to find the ultimate Truth or perfection as described by Campbell in his analogy of the calmed water in the pool of subconscious thought that, in its tranquil transparency, reveals what is hidden below the surface: 'I haven't been able to reach down into the great water for the timeless fishes. Now and then I see a certain glow like aurora borealis but it shifts and wavers. Sometimes it seems that this is not a matter for effort but for prayer' (1975: 656). This last, seemingly innocent, sentence may refer to his growing acceptance of the Oriental concept of *wei wu wei*, or doing not doing –

but it may also hint at a re-evaluation of the primitive faith of his childhood. And so it was that Steinbeck, in his own evaluation of his work, never succeeded in 'breaking through' to the 'tremendous and terrible poetry' of finding the 'God unknown' which was the Holy Grail that he was seeking along with Joseph and with Lancelot. I believe, however, that many of his readers will agree with me that he often came very close to this ideal.

A look at certain incidents during Steinbeck's last days may cast some light upon the ambiguity that seems to surround his personal 'religion' (or lack of a formalised faith). He spent his last days at his home at Sag Harbour, on the east coast. One day, according to Benson, he proclaimed out of the blue that, "No man should be buried in foreign soil". His wife Elaine, knowing that he was expressing a wish to be buried in California, assured him that he wouldn't be inhumed in 'foreign' soil, but remarked that *she* (a Texan by birth) would be (if she was later to be buried next to him in California). Steinbeck, in a way that is reminiscent of the protagonist of *To a God Unknown* who identified his being with that of the land, told her: "No, you won't. I'll be there". On another occasion he said to Elaine, "I want the Church of England funeral service – I want the 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord'. I don't want a bunch of people getting together for a memorial telling yarns about me" (Benson, 1984: 1037). In accordance with his wishes, the beginning of 'The Order for the Burial of the Dead' from the *Book of Common Prayer and Psalms* 46 and 121 were read at his funeral.

At this juncture it may be profitable to review briefly the opinions of a few recognised Steinbeck scholars and critics in order to arrive at some evaluation of the measure of the man and the writer – and this must, of necessity, be incomplete and even biased, as John Steinbeck, the writer and the figure, is almost continually being re-discovered and re-appraised by new generations of readers. Jackson J. Benson points out that a good many things about Steinbeck's career become understandable once his writing habit is fully understood:

He loved the words, the shape, the sound, the history of meaning; he delighted in the magical properties of language: he even got satisfaction from the touch of pencil and paper. Behind nearly everything that he wrote there is a man enjoying himself, surprised and delighted that words work the way they do (1984: 1).

Tetsumaro Hayashi, in an essay entitled 'John Steinbeck: His Concept of Writing' which appears in *John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction*, edited by R.S. Hughes, recounts a humorous anecdote written to Pascal Covici in a letter from 1956 in which Steinbeck offers a simplistic reason as to why he chose to become a writer:

As an answer I recall a beautiful lady of my acquaintance who was asked by her two young daughters where babies came from. Very patiently she explained the process to them and at the end asked – 'Now – do you understand?' After a whispered conference the older girl reported – 'We understand *what* you do, but *why* do you do it?' My friend thought for a moment and then retired into the simple truth – 'Because it is fun', she said. And that's the reason for this book [*The Short Reign of Pippin IV*]. Because it is fun (1989: 139).

But Benson also states that it is important in understanding Steinbeck to realize that he had a meagre sense of self-importance:

He could be corny, know he was being corny, and still enjoy it without worrying about the consequences. He could write something like 'Fishing in Paris' and not even consider the possibility that this might affect his readers' reactions to his more serious work. He carried a certain amount of innocence with him throughout his lifetime both as to his own work and to others' reaction to it. What an unpleasant sort of business for those who demand that a writer shape his own career like a sculptor carving his own image as a monument to himself. The Aunt Sally that haunted Steinbeck was Henry James. Our neo-Jamesean expectations have been that every writer 'progress' from simplicity

to complexity, that every novel by a writer be a further refinement of the familiar, that every thread of the fabric of a writer's life be tied to his art, and that every public statement be a quotable pronouncement ... And like Mark Twain's wife who tried very hard to civilize her husband, the critics were after Steinbeck during much of his career, shaking their heads, clucking their tongues, trying to convert him to a decent sense of artistic responsibility. But Steinbeck just could not stand respectability; he always took off for new territory, sometimes tripping over his own feet, but always going his own way ... That he rubbed so many of the right people the wrong way may be reason enough to love him (1984: 2).

Although some critics find little in Steinbeck's work that is extraordinarily subtle or complex, he is often more profound than a careless reader or critic would give him credit for. And no matter how long the list of faults that a sophisticated reader or critic may construct in response to Steinbeck's fiction, there is, according to Benson

... something so engaging at the heart of his best work that it is impossible to dismiss that work completely ... I would suggest that his work attracts our special attention and affection because he was a lover of life, rather than a hater of life. And closely allied to his love for living is another attitude that gains our attention and favor: he never uses his work, overtly or covertly, to declare his superiority (1984: 2-3).

Other eminent scholars such as Joseph Fontenrose, Professor in Classics at the University of California, who received the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship for study in Greece and was a senior Classical Fellow at the American Academy in Rome as well as a visiting scholar in Greece on a Guggenheim Fellowship, would not align himself with Benson's warm but rather patronizing portrayal of Steinbeck as a serious artist. Fontenrose is certain Steinbeck should be taken seriously, believing that mythology, one of Fontenrose's specialities as a classical scholar, is of particular relevance to Steinbeck studies, and that, contrary to the opinions of certain readers and critics, traditional myths and legends are at the

core of Steinbeck's art. Although Biblical and Arthurian themes predominate in Steinbeck's work, Fontenrose states that Greek mythology [in which Steinbeck was well-versed] is by no means absent. Furthermore, Steinbeck's theory of group organisms, prominent in especially his earlier novels, is also deserving of serious consideration by political theorists. Fontenrose has the following to say to Steinbeck critics:

If it is a criterion of greatness in a writer that that no critic can comprehend the whole of his work or ever say the last word about it, then Steinbeck is surely a great writer and there will be no end of criticism, since every critical writer will judge his work from a different viewpoint (1963: V).

R.S. Hughes, in his *John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction*, points out that Steinbeck was an innovative artist in that he explored a variety of story types including sketches, parables, allegories, beast fables, and even science fiction – but that he also attempted various styles:

[H]is best known is a crisp, graphic prose that renders his native California with picturelike accuracy. Though few critics would argue that his canon is uniformly brilliant, Steinbeck created a number of short story masterpieces. Comparing him favorably with Chekhov, André Gide concludes, Steinbeck wrote 'nothing more perfect, more accomplished, than certain of [his] short stories'. Indeed, 'The Chrysanthemums', 'Flight', *The Red Pony*, and others rank among the finest stories of Steinbeck's era, and they continue to be read today (1989: xi).

Peter B. High, in *An Outline of American Literature*, states that Steinbeck's characters, especially in the Thirties, are 'naturalistic' in the classic meaning of the word. They are driven by forces in themselves and in society and his naturalistic way of looking at things is combined with a deep sympathy for people and the human condition: 'We feel that he really does love humanity. Steinbeck's books search for

the elements in human nature that are common to all people. He usually finds them in the family, the group and the nation, rather than in the individual' (1986: 163).

Peter Lisca, recognised as one of the most eminent Steinbeck scholars, takes thorough cognizance, in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, of disparaging opinions expressed by certain critics who grudgingly attribute Steinbeck's successes to elements ranging from the fact that 'Steinbeck is a Californian' [whatever significance that may have], to 'the social attitude' expressed in his favoured works: 'When some little aspect of good technique has been noted, it has been usually accompanied by the kind of surprised disbelief one might feel in finding the carcass of a leopard on Mount Kilimanjaro' (1958: 19-20).

Lisca quotes examples of critics such as Frederic J. Hoffman attributing good passages in *The Grapes of Wrath* to Steinbeck's 'almost unwitting' application of 'caution and factual decorum demanded by the material' and of Maxwell Geismar's doubts about whether certain aesthetic subtleties found in *In Dubious Battle* were actually intended by the author. Lisca states that similar remarks were made by Edmund Wilson, W.M. Frohock and others – but concludes:

The notion that such complex works of art as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* were accomplished 'unwittingly' or 'unintentionally' is dispelled when these works are accorded the respect of close attention. And this same close attention will reveal in Steinbeck's work as a whole those qualities of insight and discipline which are essential to the creation of great art (1958: 19-20).

When John Steinbeck was interviewed in Sweden in 1962 on being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, he responded to two questions in particular, in a way that reveals a great deal about the man.

Q: How do you look upon yourself as an author ?

A: I have never looked upon myself as an author. I've considered myself a writer because that's what I do. I don't know what an author does.

Q: Do you really think you deserve the Nobel Prize ?

A: Frankly, no (Benson, 1984: 915).

Jackson J. Benson probably encapsulates a great deal of what can truthfully be said about John Steinbeck without undue fear of contradiction:

He cared about language, and he cared about people. He didn't want to be famous or popular – he just wanted to write books. But he became both. From the many serious writers of our time, he became for a great many people, here [in America] and throughout the world, the one writer who counted, the one who touched them. He made words sing and he made people laugh and cry. He made them think – about loneliness, self-deception, and injustice. And in all he wrote, he testified to his belief that everything that lives is holy (1984: ix).

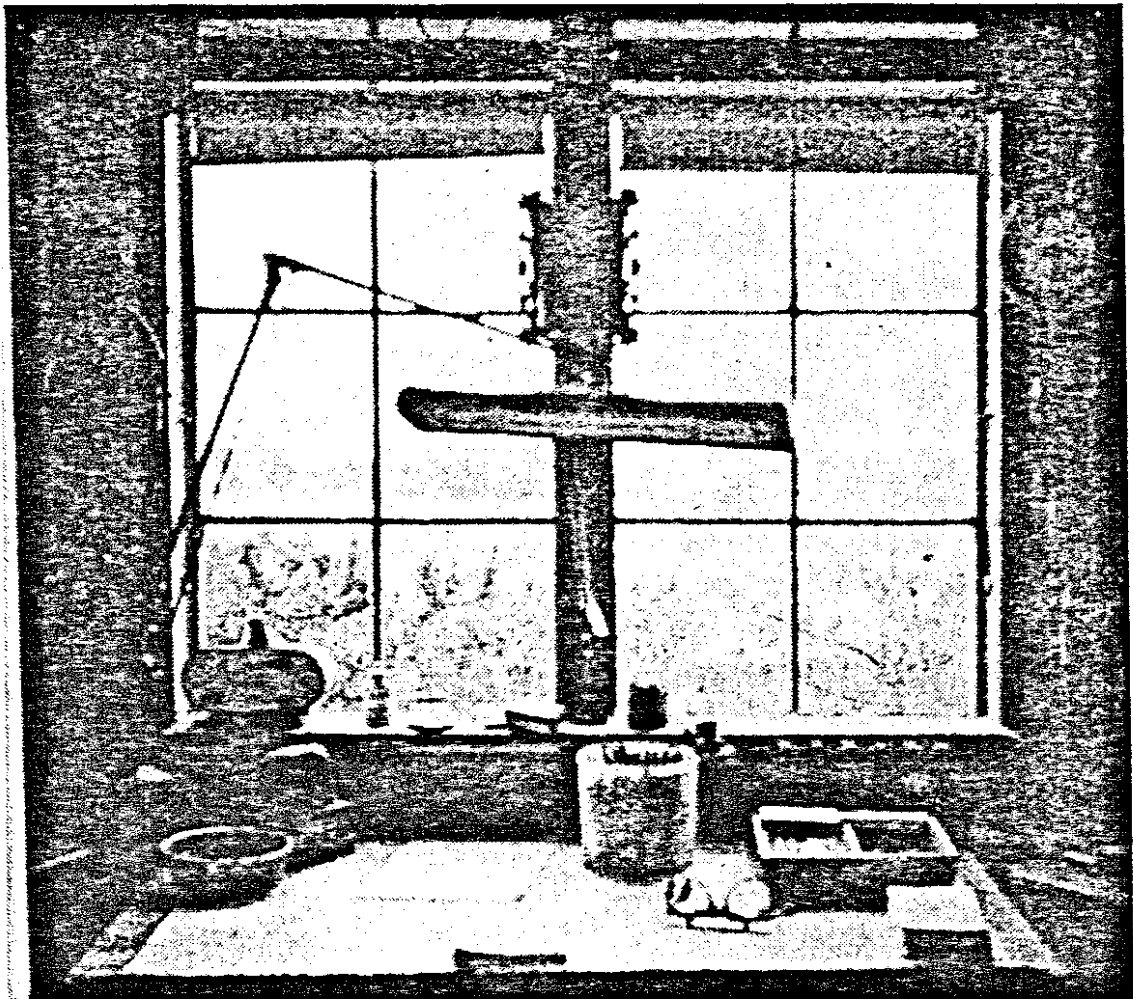
The following lines from Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Songs of Travel and Other Verses' which were read by Henry Fonda at John Steinbeck's funeral, seem to be a fitting epitaph to a man who loved words and who continues to instil this love in others:

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them
Still they are carolled and said
On wings they are carried
After the singer is dead
And the maker is buried.



John with Angel, during the last Summer, July 14, 1968
(*Courtesy Elaine Steinbeck*)

John's desk (adjustable drafting board) in Joyous Garde, looking out over
cove from Bluff Point (*Jackson J Benson*)



Steinbeck Chronology

1902: John Ernst Steinbeck was born on 27 February in Salinas, California. His father was manager of a flour mill and, later on, treasurer of Monterey County; his mother had been a school teacher. He was the third of four children and the only son.

1919: Graduated from high school. Began attending Stanford University intermittently.

1924: First work published: two stories in the *Stanford Spectator* ('Fingers of Cloud' and 'Adventures in Arcademy'). Wrote 'The Lady in Infra-Red', an unpublished short story that formed the basis for his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, which was published five years later.

1925: Left Stanford. Moved to New York City and wrote short stories but could find no publisher. Worked as manual labourer before embarking on a short but unsuccessful career as a journalist. Of the twelve stories written during this period, only six survive.

1926: Returned to California and continued to write, supporting himself with a variety of jobs, including caretaker of a snowbound estate off the south shore of Lake Tahoe. Continued working on 'The Green Lady', an unfinished play taken over from Toby Street, which was the starting point for what eventually became Steinbeck's novel *To a God Unknown* (published in 1933).

1927: First professionally published short story, 'The Gifts of Iban' appears in *The Smokers Companion* under the pseudonym John Stern.

1928 Employed as caretaker at the Tahoe City Fish Hatchery. Still working on 'The Green Lady'.

1929 First novel, *Cup of Gold*, published. Draft of 'To an Unknown God' completed but temporarily abandoned.

1930: Married Carol Henning and moved to the family cottage in Pacific Grove. Met Ed Ricketts.

1931: Began his permanent association with McIntosh and Otis, his literary agents. 'To an Unknown God' tentatively submitted for possible publication but soon withdrawn again in order to rewrite.

1932: *The Pastures of Heaven* published.

- 1933 *To a God Unknown* published. The first two parts of *The Red Pony* published as 'The Gift' and 'The Great Mountains' in the magazine, *North American Review*.
- 1934 His mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, died. His short story, 'The Murder', won the O. Henry Prize.
- 1935: His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, died. Two short stories, 'The White Quail' and 'The Snake' published. *Tortilla Flat*, his first real success as a novel, published.
- 1936: *In Dubious Battle* published. Short stories published: 'The Leader of the People', 'The Vigilante', 'Breakfast', and 'Saint Katy the Virgin'. Moved to Los Gatos, California.
- 1937: *Of Mice and Men* (novel) published; chosen by Book-of-the-Month Club. *The Red Pony*, in three parts, published. *Of Mice and Men* (play version, which won the Drama Critics' Circle Award) produced.
- 1938: *The Long Valley* and the fourth part of *The Red Pony* published.
- 1939: *The Grapes of Wrath* published. Elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters. Film of *Of Mice and Men* released.
- 1940: Sails to the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) with Ed Ricketts; films *The Forgotten Village* in Mexico. Film of *The Grapes of Wrath* released. Awarded Pulitzer Prize for the novel.
- 1941: *The Forgotten Village* and *Sea of Cortez* published. Separated from Carol (Henning) Steinbeck and moved to New York. Short story: 'How Edith McGillcuddy Met Robert Louis Stevenson'.
- 1942: His novel, *The Moon is Down*, published, and produced as a play. *Bombs Away* published. Divorced from Carol.
- 1943: Married Gwendolyn Conger. War correspondent in European Theatre for the *New York Herald Tribune*. First edition of *The Portable Steinbeck* published.
- 1944: *Lifeboat* (film) released. Birth of son Thom. Moved back to California.
- 1945: *Cannery Row* published. *The Red Pony* published in four parts. *A Medal for Benny* (film) released. Returned to New York.
- 1946: Son John IV ('Catbird') born on 12 June. Awarded the King Haakon Liberty Cross (Norway) for *The Moon is Down*.

1947: *The Wayward Bus* published; Book of the Month Club selection. *The Pearl*, story, published, film released. Correspondent in Russia with photographer Robert Capa for *New York Herald Tribune*.

1948: *A Russian Journal* published. Went back to California. Elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters. Divorced from Gwendolyn (Conger) Steinbeck. Ed Ricketts dies (11 May) after car/train collision (7 May). Steinbeck suffers a two-year spell of depression during which he is also in financial straits.

1949: Film of *The Red Pony* released. 'His Father' published by *Reader's Digest*. Returned to the East Coast.

1950: *Burning Bright*, novel published, play produced. Married Elaine Scott (28 December).

1951: *Log from the Sea of Cortez* (including 'About Ed Ricketts') appears.

1952: Correspondent abroad for *Collier's*. *East of Eden* published. *Viva Zapata!* (film) released.

1954: *Sweet Thursday* published. Lived abroad for nine months. Correspondent for *Le Figaro*, Paris.

1955: *Pipe Dream* (musical adaptation of *Sweet Thursday*) produced. Bought summer cottage in Sag Harbor, Long Island.

1956: Covered both national conventions for Louisville *Courier-Journal* and syndicate. Short story 'Affair at Rue de M—' wins O. Henry Prize.

1957: *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* published. Correspondent in Europe for Louisville *Courier-Journal* and syndicate. Began research on Malory and *Morte d'Arthur*. Attended P.E.N. Congress in Tokyo.

1958: *Once There Was a War* published.

1959: Spent most of the year in Bruton, Somerset, England, working on *Morte d'Arthur*.

1960: Travelled through America, collecting material that would become *Travels with Charley*.

1961: *The Winter of Our Discontent* (last novel) published; Book-of-the-Month Club

selection. *Flight* (film) produced.

1962: *Travels with Charley* published. Steinbeck received Nobel Prize for Literature. Writes preface to textbook by Edith Ronald Mirrielees – a valued lecturer in literature from his student days.

1963: Made Cultural Exchange trip behind the Iron Curtain.

1964: Awarded United States Medal of Freedom (bestowed by the late President J.F. Kennedy) by President Lyndon Johnson.

1966: *America and Americans* published. Late in year began five-month trip through Southeast Asia as correspondent for *Newsday*. The John Steinbeck Society at Ball State University comes into being. This society was dissolved on 19 August 1994, but literature is still issued on request.

1968: John Steinbeck dies at his home in Sag Harbour on 20 December.

1969: *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*, is published.

1974: His boyhood home in Salinas opens as a museum and restaurant on what would have been his 72nd birthday.

1975: *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (edited by Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten) appears.

1976: *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, the unfinished novel that Steinbeck planned as his opus magnum and that occupied his thoughts for most of his lifetime, is published posthumously.

LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

- Altick, R. D. (1981): *The Art of Literary Research*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Astro, R. (1973): *John Steinbeck and Edward F Ricketts: The Shaping of A Novelist*. Minneapolis: The Viking Press.
- Astro, R. and T. Hayashi (eds) (1970): *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press.
- Atkinson, B. et al. (1950): *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Baker, C. (1952): *Hemingway, the Writer as Artist*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Beach, J. W. (1960): *American Fiction : 1920 - 1940*. New York: Russell & Russell.
- Bennett, R. (1939): *The Wrath of John Steinbeck*. Los Angeles: The Albuquerque Press in association with Bunster Creely.
- Benson, J.L. (1984): *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck: Writer*. London: Heinemann.
- Berthon, S. and A. (1991): *The Shape of the World: The Mapping and Discovery of Earth*. London: George Philip Ltd.
- Bradbury, M. (1983): *The Modern American Novel*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryer, J.R. (ed.) (1984): *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, edited by Jackson R Bryer. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Butler, S. (1917): *God the Known and God the Unknown*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- De Klerk, W. (1998): *Die Vreemde God en Sy Mense*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.

- De Mott, R. (1984): *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Devereux, P. (1992): *Secrets of Ancient and Sacred Places*. London: Blandford Press.
- Donald, D. H. (1987): *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.
- Dreyer, H. J. (1983): *A Manual For Writing Dissertations and Theses*. KwaDlangezwa: University of Zululand.
- Edel, L. (1956): *Henry James: The Future of the Novel*. (Edited) New York: Vintage Books, Inc.
- Ferres, J. H. (1966): *Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio*, edited by J. H. Ferres. New York: The Viking Press.
- French, W. (1961): *John Steinbeck*. New Haven, Connecticut: Twayne's College and University Press.
- French, W. (1980): *20th - Century American Literature. Introduction by Warren French*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Godhes, C. (1962): *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography (March 1961 - January 1962: Vol. 33)*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Green, D. (1987): *Shaping Political Consciousness: The Language of Politics In America From McKinley to Reagan*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Harrison, D. (1981): *The White Tribe of Africa*. Pretoria: Sigma Press (Pty) Ltd.
- High, P. B (1986): *An Outline of American Literature*. London and New York: Longman.
- Hooper, M.J. (1992): *The Silence at the Interface: Culture and Narrative in Selected Twentieth-Century Southern African Novels in English*. Unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Natal, Durban.
- Horton, R.W. and H.W. Edwards. (1952): *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

- Hughes, R. S. (1989): *John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Johnson, P. (1983): *A History of the Modern World from 1917 to the 1980's*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Kaplan, J. (1966): *Mr Clemens and Mark Twain: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Keung, H. (1966): *The Unknown God?* New York: Sheed and Ward.
- Lisca, P. (1958): *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Lisca, P. (1978): *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.
- Litz, A.W. (ed.). (1963): *Modern American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lukacs, G. (1920; 1970): *The Theory of the Novel*. Berlin: P. Cassirer. London: The Merlin Press.
- Madsen, D. (1983) *Successful Dissertations and Theses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Meaden, G.T. (1990): *The Stonehenge Solution: Sacred Marriage and the Goddess*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Naidoo, T.S. (1981): *A Study of the Moral, Social, and Aesthetic Ideals in Ben Jonson's Non-Dramatic Poetry*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation: University of Durban-Westville, Durban.
- O'Rourke, P.J. (1994): *All The Trouble In The World*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Osborne, R. (1992): *Philosophy for Beginners*. New York: Writers and Readers Publishing Incorporated.
- Paul, S. (1984): *Emerson Essays*, with an introduction by S. Paul. London: J.M. Dent & Sons.
- Randall, J. L. (1977): *Parapsychology and the Nature of Life: A Scientific Appraisal*. London: Sphere Books.

- Swan, K. D. (1974): *Perspectives on the Fiction of John Steinbeck: A Critical Review of Two Prominent Steinbeck Critics – Peter Lisca and Warren French*. An Unpublished Dissertation for a Doctorate Degree. Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University.
- Seymour-Smith, M. (ed.) (1980): *Novels and Novelists: A Guide to the World of Fiction*. London: Shuckburgh Reynolds.
- Skurka, N. and J. Naar. (1976): *Design for a Limited Planet: Living with Natural Energy*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Steinbeck, E. and R. Wallsten (eds.) (1975): *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*. London: Pan.
- Tedlock, E.W. and C.V. Wicker. (eds.) (1969): *Steinbeck And His Critics*. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press.
- Tomalin, C. (1980): *Shelley and His World*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Turabian, K.L. (1973): *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van der Post, L. (1976): *Jung and the Story of Our Time*. London: Penguin.
- Waelder, R. (1965): *Psychoanalytic Avenues to Art*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Wagner-Martin, L. (1990): *The Modern American Novel, 1914 - 1945: A Critical History*. Boston: Twayne.
- Watson, L. (1990): *The Nature of Things: The Secret Life of Objects*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Webster's Comprehensive Reference Dictionary and Encyclopedia*. (1954) Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company.
- White, V. (1956): *God the Unknown and Other Essays*. London: Harvill Press.
- Wilson, E. (1941): *The Boys In The Back Room*. San Francisco: Colt Press.
- Wynn, E.C. (ed.) (1983): *The Short Story: 50 Masterpieces*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Yeats, W. B. (1961): *Autobiographies*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE:
Original date of publication is listed first.

- Steinbeck, J. (1929; 1971): *Cup of Gold*. London: Corgi Books.
- Steinbeck, J. (1932): *The Pastures of Heaven*. New York: Brewer, warren and Putnam.
- Steinbeck, J. (1933): *The Red Pony*. New York: Covici - Friede.
- Steinbeck, J. (1933; 1973): *To A God Unknown*. London: Corgi Books.
- Steinbeck, J. (1935): *Tortilla Flat*. New York: Covici -Friede.
- Steinbeck, J. (1936): *In Dubious Battle*. New York: Covici - Friede.
- Steinbeck, J. (1937; 1982): *Of Mice and Men*. New York: Heinemann Inc. & Octopus Inc.
 (Published jointly in arrangement with Viking Press, Great Britain).
- Steinbeck, J. (1938; 1973): *The Long Valley*. London: Corgi Books.
- Steinbeck, J. (1939; 1982): *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Heinemann Inc. & Octopus Inc.
 Inc. (Published jointly in arrangement with Viking Press, Great Britain).
- Steinbeck, J. (1941; 1951): *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Steinbeck, J. (1942): *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Steinbeck, J. (1942; 1958): *The Moon Is Down*. London: Pan Books.
- Steinbeck, J. (1945; 1982): *Cannery Row*. New York: Heinemann Inc. & Octopus Inc.
 (Published jointly in arrangement with Viking Press, Great Britain).
- Steinbeck, J. (1945; 1987): *The Pearl*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Steinbeck, J. (1947): *The Wayward Bus*. Kingswood, Surrey: The Windmill Press.
- Steinbeck, J. (1950): *Burning Bright*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Steinbeck, J. (1952; 1963): *East of Eden*. London: Pan Books Ltd.
- Steinbeck, J. (1954; 1958): *Sweet Thursday*. London: Pan Books Ltd.

Steinbeck, J. (1957): *The Short Reign of Pippin iv*. New York: Viking Press.

Steinbeck, J. (1958; 1973): *Once There Was A War*. London: Corgi Books.

Steinbeck, J. (1961): *The Winter of Our Discontent*. New York: The Viking Press.

Steinbeck, J. (1962): *Travels With Charley*. London: Pan Books Ltd.

Steinbeck, J. (1969): *Journal of a Novel*. New York: The Viking Press.

Steinbeck, J. (1976) *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*. London: Pan Books Ltd.