



THE ANALYSIS JOHN STEINBECK'S NOVELS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7735520>

Abstract: There are many well known American writers. One of them is John Steinbeck Full name John Ernst Steinbeck also wrote under the pseudonym Amnesia Glasscock American novelist, short story writer, essayist, poet, journalist, playwright, and screenwriter. John Steinbeck became known as an important American writer with his epic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. Other early works include *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Long Valley* (1938). He was also known for a profusion of short stories, nonfiction works, and more. Key words: pseudonym, epic novel, characters, settings, themes, psychological novel, innocence, maturation

Steinbeck wrote many stories and novels in different directions of literature. Most of his novels devoted to human psychology. Steinbeck's first three novels went unnoticed, but his humorous tale of pleasure-loving Mexican-American, *TORTILLA FLAT* (1935), brought him wider recognition. The theme of the book-the story of King Arthur and the forming of the Round Table- emailed well hidden from the readers and critics as well. However, Steinbeck's financial situation improved significantly- he had earned \$ 35 a week ¹ for a long time, but now he was paid thousands of dollars for the film rights to *Tortilla Flat*.

"In dubious battle" (1936) was a strike novel set in the California apple country. The strike of nine hundred migratory workers is led by Jim Nolan devoted to his cause. Before his death Jim confesses: "I never had time to look at things, Mac, never. I never looked how leaves come out. I never looked at the way things happen." One of the characters, Doc Burton, a detached observer, Steinbeck partly derived from his friend Ed Ricketts. Later Steinbeck developed his observer's personality with changes in such works as "Cannery Row" (1945), which returned to the world of *Tortilla Flat*. The novel was an account of the adventures and misadventures of workers in a California cannery and their friends. Its sequel, "Sweet Thursday", appeared in 1954.

The events of "The Red Pony" (1937) take place on the Tiflis ranch in the Salinas Valley, California. The first two sections of the story sequence, "The Gift" and "The Great Mountains", were published in the *North American Review* in 1933, and the third section, "The Promise", did not appear in *Harpers* until 1937. with "The Leader of the People", the four sections are connected by common characters, settings, and themes. Though each story, the reader follows Jody's initiation into adult life, in which the pony of the title functions as a symbol of his innocence and maturation. A movie version, for which Steinbeck wrote the screenplay, was made in 1949. Among Steinbeck's other film scripts is *The Pearl*, the story for Alfred

²³*Systematic Psychology: Prolegomena Macmillan 1929 p121*

Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (1944), and the script for Elias Kazan's *Viva Zapata!* (1952), starring Marlon Brando.

"Of Mice and Men" (1937), a story of shattered dreams, became Steinbeck's first big success. Steinbeck adapted it also into a three-act play, which was produced in 1937. George Milton and Lenya Small, two itinerant ranch hands, dream of one day owning a small farm. George acts as a father figure to Lonnie, who is large and simpleminded. Lonnie loves all that is soft, but his immense physical strength is a source of troubles and George is needed to calm him. The two friends find work from a farm and start saving money for their future. Annoyed by the bullying foreman of the ranch, Lenny breaks the foreman's arm, but also wakes the interest of the ranch owner's flirtatious daughter-in-law. Perhaps we can't understand Cathy, but on the other hand we are capable of many things in all directions, of great virtues and great sins. And who in his mind has not propped the black water?"

Steinbeck wrote thousands of letters, sometimes several a days. To Pascal Covici, his friend, he confessed that he wanted to write the work to his sons, the story of good and evil, love and hate, to demonstrate to them how they are inseparable. His writing process Steinbeck recorded minutely in *Journal of a novel* (1969). "But tell me", he wrote to Covici, "have you ever been this closely associated with a book before? While it was being written."

In 1959 Steinbeck spent nearly a year at Discover Cottage in England, working with Mortimer's Arthur, the first book he had read as a child. After returning to the United States, he travelled around his country with his poodle, Charley, and published in 1962 *Travels with Charley in search of America*. His son John wrote in his memoir that Steinbeck was too shy to talk to any of the people in the book. "He couldn't handle that amount of interaction. So, the book is actually a great novel".

"The winter of our discontent" (1961), set in contemporary America, was Steinbeck's last psychological novel. The book was not well received, and critics considered him an exhausted. Not even the Nobel Prize changed opinions. The New York Times asked in an editorial, whether the prize committee might not have made a better choice. Steinbeck took this public humiliation hard. In later years he did much special reporting abroad, dividing his time between New York and California.² For a while, Steinbeck served as an advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose Vietnam policies he agreed with. At Camp David the President asked Steinbeck to go to Vietnam to report on the war. Steinbeck wrote for the newspaper *Newsday* a series of articles, which divided his readers. The *New York Post* attacked him for betraying his liberal past.

In his book *The Other Side of Eden* (2001), the younger John dismisses this notion as preposterous, and indeed father and son were far too physically alike for it to be true. Gwyn was lying to hurt her husband. But Steinbeck had no way of knowing that at the time, and the hatred he came to feel for her saturates *East of Eden*. Adam Trask's wife, the sadistic, murderous, brothel-keeper Cathy (later Kate), torments him with the story that their twin boys are actually the sons of Adam's brother, Charles. Young John's book is a horrifying portrait of dysfunction, his father alternately overprotective and indifferent, and his mother alcoholic and violent. On his sixteenth birthday, he tells us, she became so drunkenly abusive that he threw a TV set out of the twelfth-story window of her apartment and then "punched her in the mouth as hard as I could, and hammered at her body for God knows how

²Edward Bradford Titchener *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia (Psychology)* Itaka 1909p 76.

long.”Therapist: “Why didn’t you go to your father for protection after you beat your mother?” Young John: I’d already given up thinking he would protect me from her insanity. He was into his Great Writers Bubble, so it wasn’t like having a dad around, but instead having the Great Writer present. By the age of thirteen, I realized my father was an asshole.

Nevertheless, in interviews over the years both sons spoke affectionately and admiringly of their father, if not of his fathering. Steinbeck was only fifty when *East of Eden* was published, but very little of merit was to follow. Most disappointing to him was the failure of his years-long struggle to retell his beloved *Morted’Arthur* for contemporary readers. This reform was never completed and is of little value except as a reminder of Steinbeck’s lifelong romance with the nobility of individual heroic effort. As had happened after *The Grapes of Wrath*, after *East of Eden* he was a writer without a subject, by now decisively cut off from his roots. For his first forty years, his worldview had been dominated by California, and when he abandoned it, he was deracinated. Hemingway, you feel, never looked back; Faulkner never left home. Steinbeck did leave home, choosing to live in New York, but he remained at heart a small-town guy, an outdoorsman, fisherman, a handyman, not an urban sophisticate. His life in the big city was populated by well-known New -Yorkers-about-town:

Of his final fifteen years-a kind of Monterey with a down-East accent. He could slop around, gossip with the locals, enjoy the waterfront-and observe. The result was his last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), which, although hardly a masterpiece, was Steinbeck best work since *East of Eden*. This book is not only a geographical and sociological world away from everything that preceded it, it’s also a new kind of novel for Steinbeck-a novel of moral crisis, told entirely in the first person, very much in the spirit if not the tone of East Coast novelists like his friend John O’Hara, James Gould Cozzens, John P. Marquand, Hamilton Basso (*The View from Pompey’s Head*), and Sloan Wilson (*The man in the Gray Flannel Suit*). Its protagonist, who presents himself as a decent man and law-abiding citizen, is confronted with temptation and succumbs, almost committing a serious crime and betraying both his employer and a childhood friend- in effect, everything he believed in. at the end, he’s a demoralized man, forced to acknowledge to himself exactly what he has become. *The Winter of Our Discontent*, however, is ni\ot only about a personal crisis but about a greater one as well:

Readers seeking to identify the fiction people and places here described would do better to inspect their own communities and search their own hearts, for this book is about a large part of America today. Steinbeck had found his last big subject-the moral deterioration of the times. *The Winter of Our Discontent* pits honest work against new, get-rich- quick money; decency against slickness and trickiness. Ethan Hawley’s moments of weakness and the dishonesty of his adolescent son, reflecting the contemporary Charles Van Doreen scandal, are deliberately projected as symptoms of a national collapse. It’s not, then, by accident that Steinbeck’s last ambitious project in *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962). On his cross-continent trip in the camper he’s named *Ruminant*, after Don Quixote’s horse, he finds the old-fashioned virtues of independence and community more or less vanished. Everyone’s on the move: “You got roots you sit and starve,” a woman living in a mobile home tells him. In Monterey, his fantasy paradise, he’s faced with the painful truth that “Doc,” “Danny,” and the Round Table of good-natured bums and big-hearted whores no longer exist-if they ever did. The horrible racism he encounters in New Orleans when a group of white woman-“The



Cheerleaders"-scream³ obscene and violent words at a tiny black girl being ushered into a newly desegregated school propels him back home, sickened for his country.

Steinbeck's heart, as always, is in the right place, but there's something artificial about Charley: many of the encounters he reports sound like pure inventions. His son John put it bluntly: "Thom and I are convinced that he never talked to any of those people....He just sat in his camper and wrote all that shit."

During the Sixties he had become a kind of cultural ambassador for the United States, close to people like Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Dag Hammarskjold. He had always been less radical than people thought he was- the outrage over injustice and poverty in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* was personal, not ideological. He was, in fact, a liberal, middle-of-the-road Democrat-passionate about FDR, an ardent campaigner for Adlai Stevenson, and eventually close to Lyndon Johnson, whom he liked and vigorously supported, particularly on the Vietnam War.

This position did nothing to improve his standing with intellectuals, but it was sincere. He believed the Viet Cong were murderers, despised the draft-card burners back home, and admired the American troops he encountered as a war reporter on a trip to Southeast Asia in 1966, only two years before his death. Young John was in Vietnam, and Steinbeck managed to get himself helicopter to an exposed hill outpost where John was fighting. In a surreal moment, the mutually antagonistic father and son found themselves under fire together. The son was to write, "I saw my father behind some sandbags overlooking my position with his M-60 at the ready... I mean, who, in God's name, was producing this movie?"

Steinbeck's final work years were spent on journalism, and his subject was almost inevitably America. A collection of think pieces and nostalgia called *America and Americans* (1966) reveals him at his most characteristic. He's moralizing, he's didactic, and he's searching for big answers to big questions. He's generous and vulnerable and touchy. And he's more and more dismayed by what he sees around him: "I have named the destroyers of nations: comfort, plenty, and security- out of which grow a bored and slothful cynicism." You could say that by the end he had evolved into a kind of minor and irrelevant prophet, both disillusioned and irredeemably optimistic. And he's become that unfashionable and embarrassing thing, a patriot. "I believe," he wrote at the end of his life, that out of the whole body of our past, our of our differences, our quarrels, our many interests and directions, something has emerged that is itself unique in the world: America-complicated, paradoxical, bullheaded, shy, cruel, boisterous, unspeakably dear, and very beautiful.

John Steinbeck writes *The Moon Is Down* from a third-person omniscient point of view, allowing the reader to know all characters' thoughts and feelings. A critique of the book found in the introduction to the novel, asserts that Steinbeck presented his story with a "sure sense of audience and empathy for the oppressed."⁴

While a few critics called him on presenting the Nazis in an admirable light, Steinbeck's concern was not with a critic's review; rather, his goal was to reach as many suffering people as he could with his message of hope. Steinbeck sensed that individuals in occupied cities and towns might view their captors in a more favorable way than did Americans thousands of miles away.

³Edward Bradford Titchener "Proceeding of the American Philosophical society", Itaka 1911 p45

⁴J. Steinbeck "The Moon is Down" New York 1942

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