A Thematic Approach to John Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle

James W. Grinnell

Follow this and additional works at: https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
A THEMATIC APPROACH TO JOHN STEINBECK'S IN DUBIOUS BATTLE

BY

JAMES W. GRINNELL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science, Major in Language Skills, South Dakota State University

1965
This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. <strong>STATEMENT OF PURPOSE</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. <strong>A REVIEW OF PERTINENT CRITICISM</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. <strong>THE PHALANX THEORY</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prevailing Group</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Action and the Phalanx Theory</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Phalanx Theory and <em>In Dubious Battle</em></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. <strong>LEADERSHIP AND ITS APPLICATION TO IN DUBIOUS BATTLE</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. <strong>OWNERSHIP AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO IN DUBIOUS BATTLE</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. <strong>NON-TELEOLOGY AND IN DUBIOUS BATTLE</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. <strong>CONCLUSIONS</strong></td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A <strong>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to provide the reader, particularly the undergraduate, with an aid for studying John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*. In order to make this provision, I have selected four themes that recur in nearly all of Steinbeck's fiction. In the course of this thesis these four themes, namely, the phalanx theory, the concepts of leadership and of ownership, and non-tellectual thought, are examined first in Steinbeck's writing in general, and then in the novel *In Dubious Battle* in particular. It is hoped that this examination will prove helpful not only to the reader of *In Dubious Battle*, but also to the reader of other of Steinbeck's works.

Because the reader, including the undergraduate student of literature, usually does not have the time to read more than two or possibly three works by a given author, he may not be able to establish the relative worth of recurring themes if he is aware of them at all. In anticipating this problem, I am attempting to recount the themes, to show the manner in which they recur in Steinbeck's fiction, and finally, to relate them to the novel, *In Dubious Battle*. It is hoped that this study will help the reader to better understand Steinbeck as a writer and, more importantly, better appreciate *In Dubious Battle*.

Before I begin an examination of the themes, I shall present in Chapter II a review of criticism related to the four themes taken up
in this study. Of particular interest is the divergence among the critics in regard to interpretation and evaluation of Steinbeck as a writer.

The first of the four themes to be examined is the phalanx theory. This theory purports that men often function in units, and in doing so, lose much of their individuality. Chapter III considers Steinbeck's ideas concerning the phalanx theory as related in the non-fictional book, The Log from the Sea of Cortez; the functioning of the phalanx or group-man in Steinbeck's fiction; and the question of whether or not the phalanx theory allows for individual thought and action. Finally, it considers the importance of the phalanx theory to an understanding of characters of In Dubious Battle.

Chapter IV examines the recurring theme of leadership. Again, Steinbeck provided the most explicit statements of his concept of leadership in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, even though the theme occurred in earlier novels. He divides leadership into that of free men and, as he called them, herd men or group-men. Chapter IV examines these two types of leadership as they occur in Steinbeck's fictional works in general, and then in In Dubious Battle. This theme is particularly important because In Dubious Battle is a strike novel, and the chief protagonists are the leaders of the strike.

Ownership is the theme discussed in Chapter V. There are several variations of this theme in Steinbeck's writing. First, there recurs the idea that ownership is a burden for simple people. Secondly, Steinbeck states in The Log from the Sea of Cortez that the owners of
land are caught up in a continuous cycle. The idea of a cycle is particularly important in such novels as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, novels which deal with conflict between landowners and people without land. Thirdly, the destruction of possessions by fire, a common occurrence in Steinbeck's fiction, is examined. Finally, the relationship of ownership to the major characters in *In Dubious Battle* is brought out.

The fourth and last thematic approach to be considered in this study is Steinbeck's apparent preference for non-teleology as opposed to teleology. In short, this is a preference for accepting what "is" rather than for instituting changes in existing conventions. Steinbeck's acceptance of existing conditions raises an interesting question. How could one who accepts things as they are write a novel that seemingly favors a change in labor conditions? An attempt to answer this question is made by examining two types of Steinbeck's characters, the teleologists and the non-teleologists.

Before proceeding to a discussion of criticism of Steinbeck's works, the reader should be knowledgeable of the terminology that is peculiar to that criticism.

**Definitions of Terms**

While most of the terminology used in this study is quite common in Steinbeckian criticism, some of it might appear ponderous to one approaching criticism of Steinbeck's fiction for the first time. It seems desirable, therefore, to clarify such terminology early.
The "phalanx theory" is such a term. Henry Moore in his The Novels of John Steinbeck seems to have been the first critic to use this appellation to describe Steinbeck's characters functioning not as individuals, but as members of a group. But, as Peter Liscia points out, Steinbeck himself originated the term.

Perhaps it will aid the reader to understand the word "phalanx" better if he considers its more commonly used scientific plural, "phalanges." "Phalanges" is the anatomical designation for fingers; the relationship of fingers toward the hand often parallels the relationship of Steinbeck's characters toward the group of which they are a part. Steinbeck himself used this analogy to point out that individual animals, like fingers, have their own separate characteristics, but the animals, considered singularly, are different from the whole which they comprise. Therefore, when the term "phalanx theory" is applied to Steinbeck's fiction, it implies that each character, like a finger, has individual traits and characteristics, but it also implies that the character is governed by the group to which he belongs, just as a finger is controlled by the hand. If one completely espouses this theory, he cannot recognize that truly singular individuals exist. It is the degree of Steinbeck's commitment to this theory that is open for discussion.

---

When a group of Steinbeck's characters function together like fingers on a hand, he refers to them as group-men. Critics such as Warren French and Peter Lisca likewise apply the term to Steinbeck's characters when their actions as groups are more important than their actions as individuals. It is in this sense, that, when a group of characters function as a unit, I use the term, "group-man."

When Steinbeck's characters function as a phalanx or group-man, they also think as a unit. Individual thought does not occur. In the 1942 novel, The Moon is Down, Steinbeck chose to call group-men "herd men." Following Steinbeck's example, I employ the adjective, "herd," to describe the mass thinking of Steinbeck's group-men, thereby arriving at the term, "herd thinking." Thus, herd thinking occurs when a group of characters, often a mob, act together so closely that they think as one rather than as individuals.

When dealing with group-man versus the individual, I find it necessary to mention occasionally not only characters themselves, but also their environments. The interrelation of a being and its environment is called "ecology." Steinbeck himself used this term in The Log

---


5 A particularly good example of this usage is Lisca's discussion of the mob in In Dubious Battle as a group-man in his The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 118.

from the Sea of Cortez and defined it therein. He defined ecology as "the study of the mutual relations between an organism and its physical and sociological environment."  

From time to time critics have belittled Steinbeck's ecological treatment of man as "animalistic." The use of this term intimates that Steinbeck's biological outlook caused him to equate man with animals. The terms "animalism" and "animalistic" will be used in this study to indicate characterizations that seem to present man as less than human.

Two terms which are important to nearly any extensive study of Steinbeck's writings are "teleology" and "non-teleology." Although evidence that Steinbeck is a non-teleologist appeared in abundance in early novels such as The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown, and In Dubious Battle, Steinbeck did not clearly define his philosophy of

7For a list of references to Steinbeck's speculations on ecology, see the index of The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. 278.


11Although the preferred spelling of non-teleology omits the hyphen, Steinbeck himself and all the critics whom I have examined use the hyphen. To remain in mainstream, I will retain the hyphen.
thought until he did so in 1941 in the nonfictional The Sea of Cortez, the narrative of which was later published as The Log from the Sea of Cortez. As Warren French points out, a manner of thought that took Steinbeck, along with his friend, Ed Ricketts, nearly all of the fourteenth chapter of The Sea of Cortez to explain cannot easily be explained in a brief space, and one should read that chapter for a full account of the concept. Suffice it to say here that non-teleological thought accepts what "is," whereas teleological thought tries to find causes to explain effects; if teleology deems the effects undesirable, it desires change. "Acceptance" is a key word in understanding non-teleology, since non-teleology accepts conditions as they are, whether desirable or not. Non-teleology, however, is not opposed to change, so long as the change occurs naturally.

Such a natural change is involved in the process of what Steinbeck called "the routine of changing domination." Steinbeck speculated that animals, including man are caught up in a cycle. Within this cycle, the weak constantly grow stronger and the strong, weaker until the weak become strong enough to dominate. Then, as Steinbeck put it, "...the routine is repeated. The new dominant entrenches himself and then softens."

---

13 Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. 95.
14 Ibid.
A REVIEW OF PERTINENT CRITICISM

In a recent *Newsweek* article, it was stated that "any critic knows it is no longer legal to praise John Steinbeck." Truly, the trend in recent years has been to scorn rather than to praise John Steinbeck, but the critics are still writing about him. Although he is not as popular a subject of literary criticism as he once was, three of the four hard-cover books which deal exclusively with Steinbeck have made their appearance within the last eight years. The other appeared when Steinbeck was enjoying the height of his popularity. Because of their completeness, let us examine these four books first.

In 1939, Harry Thorton Moore published *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, a short but valuable first study of all of Steinbeck's novels printed at that time, including *The Grapes of Wrath*. Moore's book is valuable for several reasons. First, Moore presents some excellent biographical criticism of Steinbeck's fiction; he lays particular emphasis on the effects that Steinbeck's California environment had on his writing. Moore went to the trouble to include a literary map of Steinbeck's section of California. This map is, to the best of my knowledge, the only one of its kind.

---

1"The Old Steinbeck," *Newsweek*, LXV (June 26, 1961), 96.

Moore was also quite perceptive in noting at this early date the recurrence of themes. As stated earlier, his was the first critical reference to the phalanx theory. He is also, apparently, the only critic to have dealt with the "cup" effect that results from Steinbeck's setting so many of his novels in valleys. Moore's relating of these and other themes to all of the then published novels, as well as his valuable biographical material prompted Peter Lisca to say in 1955 that The Novels of John Steinbeck "... is still, sixteen years later, a very useful and informative work. . ..".

In 1957, E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker anthologized twenty-nine essays and critical articles in Steinbeck and His Critics. Of the most worthwhile articles in this collection are six essays by Steinbeck himself, three of which are concerned with his reaction to literary criticism. Peter Lisca contributed three articles, including a biographical sketch, which have not been published elsewhere. Tedlock and Wicker also included a reprint of Louis Gannett's erudite introduction to The Portable Steinbeck. The other articles are a potpourri of literary criticism of Steinbeck and his fiction. Taken singularly they

\[3^{\text{Supra, p. 4.}}\]

\[4^{\text{Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 6; although Lisca's book was published in 1958, I suggest he wrote this in 1955 on the basis of his words, "sixteen years later," 1955 being sixteen years after the publication of Moore's book.}}\]

\[5^{\text{E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker (eds.), Steinbeck and His Critics (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957).}}\]
are meritorious, but considering them as a collection, one should be cognizant that, as Harry Moore points out, nearly all present some favorable aspect of Steinbeck's writing. There is practically no adverse criticism.

Proceeding chronologically, we find that in 1958, Peter Lisca brought out his thorough study, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*. Lisca, who had written his doctoral dissertation on Steinbeck, examined all of Steinbeck's major works that are available to date with the exception of *The Winter of Our Discontent* and *Travels With Charley*. Lisca devoted a chapter each to all of Steinbeck's important works; in addition, there are substantial sections given to the minor works. In examining Steinbeck's books, Lisca noted important themes; he observed Steinbeck's growth and decline as a writer; he speculated, although morosely, on Steinbeck's future. Lisca's thoroughness, his evaluation of Steinbeckian criticism in his introduction, his access to letters between Steinbeck and his publishers make *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* essential reading for any student of Steinbeck.

---


The latest individual volume of Steinbeckian criticism to appear was Warren French's *John Steinbeck*. First printed in 1961, French's book is part of Twayne's United States authors series. French, as he himself said, tried not to duplicate *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* and *Steinbeck and His Critics*. *John Steinbeck* is similar to Lisca's *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* in that both books deal with Steinbeck's works in their chronological order. They differ, however, since in his analysis of Steinbeck's major works, French laid emphasis on Steinbeck's tendency to write allegorically, on Steinbeck's non-teleological philosophy, and on Steinbeck's consanguinity with the American transcendentalists. While French's *John Steinbeck* is shorter than Lisca's book and has a less complete bibliography, its original analysis and presentation complement rather than repeat Lisca's efforts.

Many writers, in recording literary histories or in presenting retrospective overviews, chose to include sections about John Steinbeck. It is interesting to note that, even during the heyday of Steinbeck's popularity—the early 1940's, there was sharp division over Steinbeck's worth as a writer.

In 1940, Percy H. Boyton in his *America in Contemporary Fiction* found Steinbeck generally to be praiseworthy. Although most of his

---


10Ibid., p. 10.

discussion of Steinbeck is given to a rehashing of the plots of novels. Boyton does not note an improvement in The Grapes of Wrath over Steinbeck's early works. Perhaps Steinbeck's most adamant proponent among the important critics of the early 1940's was Joseph Warren Beach. In his American Fiction 1920-1940, Beach devoted two chapters to Steinbeck, the first on the works before 1939, and the second on The Grapes of Wrath. He said that The Grapes of Wrath was American's finest proletarian novel, and that, compared with it, "... In Dubious Battle is a hole-in-the-corner thing. ..." He was not so much belittling In Dubious Battle as he was praising The Grapes of Wrath. Rather he felt that the fiction which Steinbeck had written prior to 1939 was a kind of preparation for the writing of The Grapes of Wrath.

George Snell trod a middle ground in The Shapers of American Fiction 1798-1947. He found the humorous Tortilla Flat superior to serious works such as Of Mice and Men. He called the popular Of Mice and Men "... the most artificial [sic] of all Steinbeck's novels.

---

12 Ibid., pp. 241-257.
14 Ibid., p. 327.
15 Ibid., p. 330.
16 Ibid., p. 324.
18 Ibid., pp. 192-193.
..." and said that *The Grapes of Wrath* was "formless." Although he qualified his statement on *The Grapes of Wrath* by saying that it "... ranks as one of the major fictional documents of the era," he said of Steinbeck's return to humor with *Cannery Row*, that it was a return "... to his most satisfactory manner." His preference for Steinbeck's humorous novels sets him apart from the majority of the critics.

Then there are those who found Steinbeck's fiction distasteful. In this group are Edmund Wilson, Maxwell Geismar, and Alfred Kazin. Wilson in his article, "The Californians: Storm and Steinbeck" (this article was reprinted in Wilson's *Classics and Commercial*), took Steinbeck to task for presenting humans on an animalistic level. Wilson, who misspelled "Okies" as "Oakies" and admitted to having read only five of Steinbeck's eight books, saw the laboratory in the short story, "The Snake," as "... the symbol of his *Steinbeck* tendency ... to present *human* life in animal terms." About the closest Wilson came to admitting that Steinbeck was a writer of merit was a statement to the effect that he could hold the readers' interest.

---

although, he contended, this skill covered up the fact that there was nothing behind the stories.26

Maxwell Geismar joined with Wilson in generally panning Steinbeck's fiction. His Writers in Crisis27 is unique in so far as it showed Geismar's preference for Steinbeck's early work, especially The Pastures of Heaven and In Dubious Battle, over The Grapes of Wrath. Although he did not think they were Steinbeck's best works, Geismar did feel that Of Mice and Men and The Grapes of Wrath indicated that Steinbeck was assuming "... the responsibilities of his craft in an age of crisis."28 Geismar's dislike of The Grapes of Wrath makes him the critical antithesis of Joseph Warren Beach.

It was also in 1942 that Alfred Kazin published his On Native Grounds.29 Kazin, like Edmund Wilson, criticized Steinbeck's characters: Kazin said, "... Steinbeck's people are always on the verge of becoming human, but never do."30 Wilson had criticized Steinbeck's characters for being too animal-like; Kazin, on the other hand insisted that "... Steinbeck knew how to distinguish, in works like The Long Valley, In Dubious Battle, and The Grapes of Wrath, between animal life and social privation."31 Kazin, however, had little other to say in

26Ibid.
28Ibid., p. 255.
30Ibid., p. 324.
31Ibid., p. 326.
Steinbeck's favor and concluded his discussion by saying that "... Steinbeck's world is primitive to the end—primitive with a little cunning." 32

W. M. Frohock investigated Steinbeck in a somewhat different light. His The Novel of Violence in America 33 examined the brute force in Steinbeck's novels. Frohock's discussion of Jim and Mac's methods of maintaining an "orderly" violence in In Dubious Battle is particularly interesting. 34 Since his topic was violence, Frohock did not write a great deal about such humorous works as Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, but he did generalize by saying that Steinbeck's postwar books were inferior to those written before the war. According to Frohock, Steinbeck's "... best was what he wrote in the days when he could not stand without indignation and see injustice done." 35

Although Peter Lisca stated that "... Steinbeck has been subject to ... little critical attention ..." 36 there has been, over the years, a consistent flow of critical articles about Steinbeck in periodicals. Many of these articles are short and not relevant to the present study; for this reason, I would refer the reader to the

---

32Ibid., p. 329.
34Ibid., pp. 136-137.
bibliography for a more nearly complete list. But, some of the most significant criticism written about John Steinbeck's works has been written in periodicals.

In 1931, V. F. Calverton concluded, prophetically, that critics would have to recognize the influence of left-wing literature on the American scene. Steinbeck helped to make this prophecy come true. By 1937, after having written *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck carried enough influence to prompt Edmund C. Richards to praise all his novels, especially *Of Mice and Men*. Of Steinbeck's strike novel, Richards said, "Never for a moment in this book, *In Dubious Battle*, are you left in doubt as to where Steinbeck stands. His understanding compassion is unmistakably proletarian." The same year, after the publication of *The Red Pony*, Steinbeck gained more critical support from Christopher Morley and J. H. Jackson, both of whom were high in their praise of the unspoiled author from California.

By 1938, Steinbeck had gained some very enthusiastic supporters. For example, Roscoe Burton castigated any critic who dared to pan

---


39 Ibid., p. 410.


Steinbeck. T. K. Whipple, another enthusiastic critic of Steinbeck, felt that *The Long Valley* which was published in 1938 was good, but inferior to *In Dubious Battle* which he said "... has more sheer excitement than anything else of Steinbeck's." The Grapes of Wrath, published in 1939, probably did more than any other novel to further Steinbeck's career and gain him fame as a writer. Claude E. Jones, however, concluded after reading The Grapes of Wrath that Steinbeck was not a proletarian writer, since he wrote only about the labor problems that were isolated in California.

After the beginning of the war, Steinbeck's popularity with the contributors to periodicals was not consistent. For example, L. H. Stimmel accused Steinbeck of including too much ugliness in his novels. Barker Fairley, in 1942, said that Steinbeck's success was due to his use of the vernacular, and saw The Grapes of Wrath as the apex of Steinbeck's success.

Steinbeck was creating a stir. Stimmel had said that his books were too ugly; Lincoln R. Gibbs said that "at the very worst, Steinbeck's indecencies should be condoned for the sake of the art and

---

understanding he provides."  

The interest in Steinbeck caused Carlos Baker to re-examine *In Dubious Battle* and Lewis Gannett to compile a short, historical account of Steinbeck's rise as a writer.

In 1946, Edwin B. Burgum contributed a valuable analysis of Steinbeck's novels to the growing list of critical articles. Burgum, who contrasted eight novels such as *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* with more serious works such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, called Steinbeck "...our most distinguished novelist of the thirties." 

Freeman Champney and Maxwell Geismar, in 1947, were divided on their opinions of Steinbeck. Champney, in an article called "John Steinbeck, Californian," praised Steinbeck while showing the effects that the author's Californian environment had on his writing. Geismar, on the other hand, criticized Steinbeck harshly for returning to his "primitive man" in *The Pearl*.

---


51 Ibid., p. 132.


By 1950, John Steinbeck had undergone an unhappy experience with
the theatre; overall, Steinbeck's reputation was not what it once had
been. Lewis Nichols reported the unsuccessful stage venture of Burning
Bright and Steinbeck's reactions to the failure in "A Talk With John
Steinbeck." 54 John R. Frey reported that Steinbeck was losing popu-
ularity in Europe. 55 And, by 1957, Harry T. Moore, who had done the first
major critical study of Steinbeck, had mellowed a good deal in his
excitement over Steinbeck. 56

Even in recent years, judging from the periodicals, nothing con-
clusive has been established about Steinbeck's merit or lack of it.
Alfred Kazin writing in The New York Times in 1958 spoke of "... the
peculiarly elusive quality of a writer [Steinbeck] who has flitted
uneasily from book to book, theme to theme, for the very good reason
that he lacks ... intellectual reserve..." 57 While Kazin accused
Steinbeck of lacking brainpower, other critics such as Theodore
Pollock 58 and Charles L. Sanford 59 were still praising The Grapes of

57 Alfred Kazin, "The Unhappy Man From Happy Valley," New York
Wrath. The issue was clouded even more when a *Newsweek* article praised
*The Winter of Our Discontent* while Brynes Asher said that Steinbeck's
latest novel was "... clearly a comeback effort and as clearly a
failure." R. W. B. Lewis saw Steinbeck's literary position as "... not very high at the moment. ..." Harry Morris provided what seems
to be a logical reason for the recent disagreement by recognizing that
in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, "perhaps we have witnessed in Stein-
beck himself an orthodox conversion ..." Perhaps Freeman Champney
best stated the problem when he said of Steinbeck that "he doesn't seem
to believe that literature exists to furnish orderly material for doc-
toral dissertations." If this truly applies to Steinbeck, it is even
more applicable to the critics.

Although Freeman Champney may have been correct in saying that
Steinbeck is not an easy subject for graduate school research, several
unpublished studies have been written. Already mentioned was Peter
Lisa's 1955 Ph.D. dissertation. Although it is basically the same

60 "The Old Steinbeck," p. 96.
American Fiction*, ed. A. Walton Litz (New York: Oxford University
63 Harry Morris, "The Pearl: Realism and Allegory," *English
Journal*, LII (October, 1963), 493.
64 Freeman Champney, "Critics in Search of an Author," *Antioch
Review*, XVIII (Fall, 1958), 373.
65 Lisa, "The Art of John Steinbeck: An Analysis and Inter-
pretation of Its Development."
as his previously discussed book, Lisca's dissertation differs from *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* in three ways. First, Lisca's doctoral study contains an examination of foreign criticism, primarily French, which is omitted in his book. Secondly, the bibliography of the dissertation is more extensive, and thirdly, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* includes a brief discussion of Steinbeck's 1957 novel, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, which made its appearance after Lisca had written his dissertation.

*Also of value to one interested in thematic patterns in John Steinbeck's novels is Lester Jay Marks' "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck."*\(^{66}\) One of the most scholarly of the unpublished studies, this 1961 study traced the three themes of private religion, the group animal and its calls, and non-teleological thinking and a reverence for life through Steinbeck's novels up to and including *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*. Marks, whose findings are perhaps best expressed in his statement, "Man in Steinbeck's novels is enabled, first by accepting the mystery of his existence and then by seeking to discover his place in the universal scheme,"\(^{67}\) discussed each of Steinbeck's major novels in the light of the three themes which he had chosen.

---


While it is difficult to survey completely the Masters' theses concerned with John Steinbeck, I would refer the reader to studies that I found to be valuable. Hsien-Tung Lui's "A Study of the Nature of Man in the Novels of John Steinbeck" is an excellent defense of Steinbeck's presentation of man. 68 Russell B. Stoner's 1955 analysis of Steinbeck's novels 69 and Tom E. Kakonis' 1958 examination of Steinbeck's mysticism 70 both presented lucid interpretations of their respective subjects and both included adequate bibliographies. If the generalization can be risked, it would seem that the unpublished studies are usually favorable towards Steinbeck. One finds in reading the published criticism, on the other hand, a division of opinion regarding Steinbeck's worth. This division existed during Steinbeck's heyday, and is present still.

With the knowledge that critical diversity exists, let us now examine a particular novel. In Dubious Battle, in the thematic context of which it is a part.

---


III

THE PHALANX THEORY

The Prevailing Group

One familiar with John Steinbeck's fiction can scarcely deny the importance of the phalanx or group-man theory. But the question of whether or not this theory is a worthy attribute of Steinbeck's fiction is a point on which critics are divided. The theory states that all living organisms are but a part of a larger whole, and that each individual organism cannot function except as part of that whole. When the group functions as a unit, the individual is relatively unimportant, just as one cell is not very important to the entire human body. Inherent in the concept that the individual is unimportant is the Darwinian concept that, if the individual unit is weak, detrimental, or unnecessary to the whole, then this unit is usually sacrificed for the continued existence of the whole. It follows that the survival of the fittest is part of the phalanx theory. But still more important and integral to the theory is the manner in which the unit functions in relation to the larger group of which it is a part. Does the unit act individually, or are its actions determined by the whole?

This question, applied to Steinbeck's presentation of man, the highest of all living organisms, divides the critical opinion of John Steinbeck's work. What must be decided is this: Does the phalanx theory as Steinbeck applies it in his fiction portray man as an
individual of worth, capable of making decisions, or does it portray man as a glorified extension of lower life?

Steinbeck's background seems to be related to his phalanx theory. John Steinbeck had a keen interest in biology. His home town of Salinas, California, was close to the sea, and as Peter Lisca said, "from the Pacific Ocean he obtained that biological view of life (made explicit in *The Sea of Cortez*) which informs his observation of man and society."¹ Freeman Champney, too, feels that Steinbeck's environment was important inasmuch as "even a casual observer of the tide pools near Steinbeck's home gets some of the feeling for biological diversity, fecundity, and struggle which has played so important a part in Steinbeck's thinking."² If the above statements are valid, there should be little doubt that his environs were, at least in part, instrumental in Steinbeck's formulating his phalanx theory.

While Steinbeck's phalanx theory is often expressed in his fiction, it is most clearly stated in *The Sea of Cortez*, an account of a biological expedition into the Gulf of California which was written in conjunction with his close friend, Edward Ricketts, a marine biologist. Steinbeck said of this book that "... it is a good clearing-out of a


²Freeman Champney, "John Steinbeck, Californian," *Antioch Review*, VII (Fall, 1947), 347.
lot of ideas that have been working on me for a long time." It is in Steinbeck's portion of the book, later published alone as The Log from Sea of Cortez, that this picture of a school of fish, operating as a single being occurs.

In their millions they followed a pattern minute as to direction and depth and speed. There must be some fallacy in our thinking of these fish as individuals. Their functions in the school are in some as yet unknown way as controlled as though the school were one unit. We cannot conceive of this intricacy until we are able to think of the school as an animal itself, reacting with all its cells to stimuli which perhaps might not influence one fish at all. And this larger animal, the school, seems to have a nature and drive and ends of its own. It is more than and different from the sum of its units. If we can think in this way, it will not seem so unbelievable that every fish heads in the same direction, that the water interval between fish and fish is identical with all the units, and that it seems to be directed by a school intelligence. If it is a unit animal itself, why should it not so react?

Although he later admits that this idea "is the wildest of speculations," this and other passages like it in The Log from the Sea of Cortez provide the bases for the contention that Steinbeck's people are nonthinking, robot-like people--people whose actions are governed entirely by the societal whole of which they are a part.

Critic John S. Kennedy contends that Steinbeck is "... more strongly affirming that, in the last analysis, man has no individual identity, that the human person as such, separately created and distinct..."
from all others. does not in fact exist." The contention is that this unfavorable representation of man results from an interest "... in the natural scene, and in animal life [rather] than in people or the human emotions. ..." There is much in Steinbeck's fiction to support these contentions.

An early example of his allusion to humans as animal-like beings is given in the section of The Red Pony entitled "The Leader of the People." It was there that the old grandfather, while reminiscing of the days of his youth, described the westward-moving people as "... a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast." And while the grandfather went on to say that each individual had his own wants, "... the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering." This passage seems to acquiesce with Steinbeck's statement concerning the school of fish, since, in both examples, the individual members have physical needs and wants that are individual. But in both cases, the larger "animal" prevailed, and the individuals submitted to the will of the whole.


7 Maxwell Geismar, "Fable Retold," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (November 22, 1947), 14.


9 Ibid.
In speaking of the school of fish, Steinbeck indicated that each unit of the school has its "special functions to perform," and that the "... slower units may even take their places as placating food for the predators for the sake of the security of the school as an animal."\(^{10}\) Thus, the debilitated are sacrificed for the well-being of the strong and for the group, but life goes on.\(^ {11}\)

Natural selection occurs frequently among both animals and humans in Steinbeck's fiction. In the section of *The Red Pony* entitled "The Promise," the mare was killed in order that she might give birth to the long-awaited colt. In *The Grapes of Wrath* both Grandpa and Grandma, hindrances to the "whole" which, in this case is the family, die on the way to California. But their family is small, as are all the migrant families in *The Grapes of Wrath*, too small to survive by themselves.

So it was that

... a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awe-struck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family which the night before had been lost and fearful might search its goods to find a present for a new baby. In the evening, sitting about the fires, the twenty were one.\(^ {12}\)

\(^{10}\) Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, p. 241.

\(^{11}\) Lester Jay Marks in his "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, Syracuse University), pp. 11, 61, uses the above passage as an assertion of the intelligence of the group and as a parallel of Mac's using people in *In Dubious Battle*.

Marks feels that this passage is an indication that the small family unit is but one of three divisions of mankind. He says that "it might indeed be
said . . . that Steinbeck views man as a triple thing—an individual, a part of a specific group [here, the family] and a part of a macrocosmic humanity." It is interesting to note in The Grapes of Wrath, the families fared best when they "were one," whether it was in make-shift camps along the highway, in their "Hoovervilles" or temporary towns, or in the clean, sanitary government camps. Conversely, when the families were alone, they fared badly, and, when the family unit broke down as did that of the Joads, the members lost nearly all hope.

It would seem that individual man has little importance in Steinbeck's fiction. This feeling is expressed by one of the Okies in The Grapes of Wrath when he suggests that perhaps unorganized men are worse off than are animals. He put it this way. "If a fella owns a team a horses, he don't raise no hell if he got to feed 'em when they ain't workin'. But if a fella got men workin' for him, he jus' don't give a damn. Horses is a hell of a lot more worth than men." The Okie's statement was a result of his treatment from those who owned the land.

The landowners in both In Dubious Battle and in The Grapes of Wrath realized the importance of keeping the migrant workers from

13 Marks, "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck," p. 94.

14 Ibid., pp. 318-319.
organizing. The landowners strove to keep small units from forming larger units. Their reason was that they, the owners, felt that groups made up of men who had only individual aims and goals were much easier to control. This philosophy of management is perhaps best expressed in regard to the Chinese workers mentioned in East of Eden.

These human cattle were imported for one thing only—to work. When the work was done, those who were not dead were to be shipped back. Only males were brought—no females. The country did not want them breeding. A man and a woman and a baby have a way of digging in, of pulling the earth where they are about them and scratching out a home. And then it takes all hell to root them out. But a crowd of men, nervous, lusty, restless, half sick with loneliness for women—why, they'll go anywhere, and particularly will they go home. . . . To the bosses they were not people but animals which could be dangerous if not controlled. 15

Such passages lead some critics to believe that Steinbeck intended his characters to be little more than animals. And Steinbeck, at least occasionally, seems to concur, for he writes in The Log from the Sea of Cortez that

There would seem to be only one commandment for living things: Survive! And the forms and species and units and groups are armed for survival, fanged for survival, timid for it, fierce for it, clever for it, poisonous for it, intelligent for it. This commandment decrees the death and destruction of myriads of individuals for the survival of the whole. Life has one final end, to be alive; and all the tricks and mechanisms, all the successes and all the failures, are aimed at that end. 16

There is, however, an important distinction between many of Steinbeck's characters and lower forms of animal life—that distinction is the


ability to decide, to choose. In light of critical disagreement, this distinction must be examined.

Individual Action and the Phalanx Theory

There is one basic difference between the individual units of Steinbeck's group animals and the individual units that compose his group man. This difference is man's ability to choose. Man, if he desires, has the ability to reason; lower animals do not. Man need not even be a gregarious, societal animal. To illustrate, in the early novel To a God Unknown, the hermit exercised his right to choose by living by himself in a lonely, mystical spot by the ocean. Kino, in The Pearl, demonstrated his opposition to the group desire to be rich by throwing the valuable pearl into the bay. But what is more significant is the fact that man can choose to make a sacrifice. The individual animal cannot. When it is sacrificed, it is not through its own choice. The mare in The Red Pony had no part in deciding that she would give up her life so that the colt could live. If one accepts this interpretation, he cannot help seeing that the majority of Steinbeck's characters exhibit higher qualities than do mere animals.

Steinbeck, perhaps influenced by Emerson, indicated that each man has a share in one large soul or an "oversoul" as the

---


transcendentalists called it. Jim Casy expressed this idea in *The Grapes of Wrath* by saying, "Maybe all men got one big soul everbody's a part of." Of course, animals too have a part in a larger scheme, but, as will be noted, there is a difference. Some critics were aware of this difference. Frederick Bracher, for example, had this to say about Steinbeck's man and animals:

The starfish plays his part in the scheme of things well enough, and for any man who is as good an animal as the starfish, Steinbeck has an honest respect. But man is differentiated from the starfish by his ability to see his part, as well as play it. Only men (though not all men) are able to achieve the understanding that 'man is related to the whole thing.' ... 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.

There is additional evidence to support Bracher's point. Marks feels that man's search "to discover his place in the universal scheme" ennobles him. And many of Steinbeck's characters, at least the ones whom he portrayed sympathetically, accepted their part in "the scheme of things." *The Grapes of Wrath* supplies several examples of this acceptance. Jim Casy's part was the giving of his life for the betterment of the Okies' condition. Tom Joad, following Casy's lead, gave

---


up his family, and disappeared, going also to do what he could to help
the migrants' cause. Although he had been a loner after he was
released from prison, he joined the group and sacrificed himself for
it. But the most poignant humanitarian sacrifice in the entire novel,
perhaps in all of Steinbeck's fiction, was that of Rose of Sharon's
unselfish gesture which concluded The Grapes of Wrath. This highly
personal sacrifice of feeding a starving man from her breast epitomizes
individual sacrifice. While this and other similar acts may offend
some readers, "the novelist advocating change must, since he is an
artist, supply concrete detail, and much of this detail must needs be
sordid, some of it vulgar and uncouth, much of it ribald, immoral, and
blasphemous."24 French sees Rose of Sharon's deed as the completion
of the Joads' learning to be brothers to all men;25 in the sense of
both education and sacrifice, it was altogether fitting that John
Steinbeck ended his most powerful novel with that act.

There are other examples of highly personal sacrifices in Stein-
beck's fiction. In Of Mice and Men, George's killing of his best
friend, Lennie, was an extreme sacrifice. In commenting on the slaying,
Edwin B. Burgum says that "... George's last act of friendship is to
kill Lennie to save him from the more cruel death at the hands of the

24 Lincoln R. Gibbs, "John Steinbeck, Moralist," Antioch Review,
II (summer, 1942), 172.

25 Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers,
But regardless of whether one regards the act as simply murder or as a sacrifice, it remains that George chose to kill his friend. He could have permitted society to punish Lennie. His choice was an individual one—one that an animal could never make. In this sense the act set George above the animals.

In the play-novel, *Burning Bright*, Steinbeck has the chief female character, Mordeen, perform an act that surpasses that of Rose of Sharon in terms of giving of one's self; she allowed herself to be impregnated by one whom she did not love in order to provide her sterile husband with a child. The play-novel, although unsuccessful, does, as Warren French points out, affirm the universal brotherhood of man, particularly in the line that states "... that every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father."

Generally, it can be said that both animals and men often perform as organized groups. Steinbeck recognized this idea. He also indicated that man, if he was to be of any value, had to make choices by himself. When men act in groups and think not individually, but as groups, then these men are no longer separate entities; rather, they are mobs. In referring to the Nazis as herd men in *The Moon Is Down*, Steinbeck said, "Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that

---


Fight on in defeat, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars." More recently in East of Eden, Steinbeck warned of group thinking as a danger to our future.

There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know. Some of these forces seem evil to us, perhaps not in themselves but because their tendency is to eliminate other things we hold good. It is true that two men can lift a bigger stone than one man. A group can build automobiles quicker and better than one man, and bread from a huge factory is cheaper and more uniform. When our food and clothing and housing all are born in the complication of mass production, mass method is bound to get into our thinking and to eliminate all other thinking. In our time mass or collective production has entered our economics, our politics, and even our religion, so that some nations have substituted the idea collective for the idea God. This in my time is the danger.

Despite this pessimistic statement, Steinbeck's outlook about man's future is fairly bright. Perhaps, in the last analysis, the best way to determine whether or not Steinbeck's people were animalistic is to examine his general philosophy of mankind's progress. But one must not forget that Steinbeck's characters were, in the main, impoverished people with undesirable environments; any presentation of people living in squalor is not going to appear attractive. James T. Farrell would have called novels such as The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle "bottom-dog" literature. As he put it,

... 'bottom-dog' literature ... is sharply realistic and ... depicts conditions of dirt, physical misery, and inner frustration, it is also a literature which introduces the


30 Steinbeck, East of Eden, p. 113.
plebeian classes on a more human level than has been the case (with a few exceptions) in the past.\(^1\)

One has only to think of Steinbeck's warm and nostalgic presentation of the denizens of Tortilla Flat and of Cannery Row to see that it is very human. Steinbeck combined warmth with an understanding of the destitute. And Steinbeck "... comes closer than his contemporaries to an understanding of the poor..."\(^2\) Albeit that his presentation cannot serve as sufficient reason for saying that his characters are more human than animal, a more conclusive defense lies in Steinbeck's general view of mankind. Steinbeck seems to feel that mankind is progressing, although that progress may be delayed from time to time. He states that ". . . man reaches, stumbles forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back."\(^3\) He repeats this same idea of progress by having Jim Casey, his chief spokesman of The Grapes of Wrath, say "the on'y thing you got to look at is that ever' time they's a little step fo'ward, she may slip back a little, but she never slips clear back."\(^4\) Could even the harshest of critics say that this view of man's progress is a derogatory representation of man?


\(^{32}\)N. E. Monroe, "Toward Significance in the Novel," College English, II (March, 1941), 546.

\(^{33}\)Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 132.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 343.
The Phalanx Theory and *In Dubious Battle*

To deal with man ecologically, one must necessarily, first examine the social environment of which man is a part. Steinbeck considered environment in a number of his works. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck stated that all things are ecologically related.  

But in considering the characters of *In Dubious Battle*, one must narrow the scope, for it is the immediate societal group to which the characters belong that is of primary concern. There are two such groups that play a significant role in *In Dubious Battle*, the Communist Party and the strikers. Only two of the characters, Jim Nolan and Mac are clearly delineated as members of the Party. The strikers, the group that concerns every important character in the novel, are of primary significance, especially when they are transformed into a mob. The strikers, functioning as a mob, comprise the real group-man in the novel.

Steinbeck recognized that man is basically a gregarious animal who can achieve more when he works with others. But he also felt, if we can accept one of his major characters as his spokesman, that a group of working men is suspicious of being exploited by those for whom the work is being performed. Mac expressed this idea in *In Dubious Battle* when he said

Men always like to work together. There's a hunger in men to work together. Do you know that ten men can lift nearly twelve times as big a load as one man can? It only takes a little

---

spark to get them going. Most of the time they're suspicious, because every time someone gets 'em working in a group the profit of their work is taken away from them ... 36

When the men are sure that they are being exploited as they were in In Dubious Battle, or if they all have a common affliction as they had in The Grapes of Wrath, they band together all the more quickly. Because the workers in In Dubious Battle were bonded together by substandard wages, they required very little provocation to be turned into a mob, or, in the terminology used here, a group-man.

This transformation is anticipated. Aggrieved men hunger for a solution just as ill-fed men hunger for meat. Steinbeck used this metaphor in both In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath to fore-shadow the action of the down-trodden workers. When the strikers were devouring half-cooked pork in In Dubious Battle, Mac commented that they should wait until it was fully cooked. Jim Nolan expressed symbolically the attitude of the mob. "They got too hungry to wait." 37

This same idea was expressed later in the words, "The guys don't want to wait till the meat's done. They want to eat it all pink inside. It'll make 'em sick if they ain't careful." 38 Just as the men could not wait for their meat to be cooked, neither could they wait for governmental labor reforms. They needed to lash out at the cause of their problem. And they did so, as one man, the group-man.


37 Ibid., p. 173.

38 Ibid., p. 240.
Steinbeck compared the transformation of disgruntled strikers into a group-man mob with water boiling. When the strikers figuratively reached their boiling point, the transformation was complete. One of the old strikers who had previously been involved in strikes explained the condition in this manner to young Jim Nolan:

You know when you're about to get fightin', crazy mad, you get a hot, sick, weak feelin' in your guts? Well, that's what it is. Only it ain't just in one man. It's like the whole bunch, millions and millions was one man, and he's been beat and starved, and he's gettin' that sick feelin' in his guts. The stiffs don't know what's happenin', but when the big guy gets mad, they'll all be there; and by Christ, I hate to think of it... Ever' place I go, it's like water before it gets to boilin'.

When "the water boiled," the men were a mob. Steinbeck, who often reiterated the idea that the mob is one big animal, also made it clear that the men who composed the mob no longer performed or thought as individuals. "It is a big animal. It's different from the men in it. And it's stronger than all the men put together. It doesn't want the same things men want..." Although it can be safely said that Steinbeck's sympathies lay with the strikers, it seems that he could not, as Bracher said, have respected the nonthinking members of the mob. He demonstrated that the strikers themselves felt ashamed after having taken part in mob activities. He portrayed them as having a

---

40 Ibid., p. 317.
41 Supra, p. 31.
kind of hang-over, for "now that the fury was past, the strikers were sick, poisoned by the flow from their own anger glands. They were weak; one man held his head between his hands as though it ached terribly."  

So, if one accepts the idea that Steinbeck valued individual thought and frowned upon people who allowed themselves to be caught up in a mob, he can judge the value that Steinbeck intended for a particular character by observing the degree in which that character was affected or caught up by the activities of the mob.

In Dubious Battle has three characters worthy of consideration. They are Jim Nolan and Mac McLeod, the two strike leaders, and Doc Burton, the doctor who cared for and, to an extent, sympathized with the strikers. Each of these characters, as we shall see, differs in his relations toward groups. Of the minor characters in the novel, it would be too general to say that they are merely cells in the group-man's body, but no one of them is developed fully enough to be considered at any length in this study.

Of the three, Mac is the easiest to pigeonhole. He is first, last, and always a Communist organizer. When he makes his first appearance in the novel, he is introduced as one who "... knows more about field work than anybody in the state." His role in the novel is that of leader of the strikers. Although leadership will be dealt with in a later chapter, it must be said here that Mac is a leader

---

43 Ibid., p. 17.
par excellence. But, in another sense, Mac is a follower, and it is in those two respects that his character will be examined.

Mac, as an organizer of the strikers, uses people. Mac, as a member of the Communist Party, is himself used. In neither of these roles can he be considered an admirable character. Steinbeck could not have intended the reader to identify with Mac who "... has rejected individuality before the book begins." He weighs practically all of his actions with the party in mind. Because of the degree of his commitment, he is incapable of individual thought and action. To be sure, he has individual characteristics, but these traits do not give him individuality in the Steinbeckian sense. The skill at which he is most proficient is that of transforming a group of strikers into a mob and then leading this mob into action. But even his role of leader of a mob, a mob being the group-man, does not give him individuality. Doc Burton made this point when he compared the group-man to a body and the members to cells of that body. While speaking to Mac of his leadership of the strikers, Doc said that "you might be an expression of a group-man, and at the same time directing him, like an eye. Your eye both takes orders from and gives orders to your brain." If one accepts Doc Burton's view, a view which Peter Lisca feels is very close to Steinbeck's, one cannot help seeing Mac merely as the "eye" of

---


the group-man, not as an individual. He is but a cell with a special function.

Mac's relationships with other people reflect this interpretation. He views others as means to an end. He does not place any value on human life. He feels no remorse even when one of his close associates, Joy, is killed. This lack of feeling was even more apparent when, at the conclusion of the novel, Jim was killed. In both cases, Mac continued to use the people even after their deaths. And the end toward which Mac was working was not really an end at all but, rather, a state of constant agitation among the workers. At no time during the course of the novel did Mac mention a specific goal that he was trying to attain. He spoke only of such temporary things as a "good ruckus." It is on this point that we find the major difference between Mac and his understudy, Jim Nolan.

In Dubious Battle is essentially Jim Nolan's book. It is told, for the most part, from Jim's point of view. It is in Jim that the only substantial change of personality takes place.

In the beginning of the book, Jim was a rebel without a cause. Although his sympathies were drawn to the Communist movement because he had lost his job as a clerk merely for being an innocent bystander at a radical meeting, his main reason for joining the movement was his desire to belong. Jim had seen his father try to fight the "system" alone and fail. As he put it, "My old man always had to fight alone. He got licked every time." 47 He was determined not to end up as his father

47 Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 33.
had; he felt that, by belonging to a group, he could be of some actual use. Thus Jim chose to be a member of a group, but his choice was an individual one. He not only did not mind being used by Mac and the party, but he was also ready to sustain personal injury if need be. In his words, "I don't mind getting smacked on the chin. I just don't want to get nibbled to death. There's a difference." The difference was that he had acquired direction in life. He acquired something that he could work for, the Communist Party. It was Jim's discovery of a goal in life that wrought a change in him.

Early in In Dubious Battle after Jim had joined the cause, he described himself as "... all swelled up with a good feeling." However, he felt something missing. He had not as yet given himself entirely to the cause, the Communist Party. He was forced to follow Mac until he became certain just what his, Jim's, end was. There were two milestones that marked his discovery of his goal and, in turn, a change in his personality. The first was a gunshot wound that he received in his arm. To Jim, the injury was a badge or outward symbol of what he was doing. He said,

I used to be lonely, and I'm not any more. If I go out now it won't matter. The thing won't stop. I'm just a little part of it. It will grow and grow. This pain in the shoulder is kind of pleasant to me... I'm not lonely any more, and I can't be licked, because I'm more than myself.50

48 Ibid., p. 39.
49 Ibid., p. 49.
50 Ibid., p. 254.
At this point Jim had given himself completely to the cause. He had, indeed, surpassed Mac in his commitment to the cause. Jim became aware of this change while watching Mac bludgeon a teen-age boy who had intended to shoot at the strikers. The change in Jim is made known when Mac, who was upset a little by the beating that he had rendered, said that he could not perform such an action again. Jim replied that Mac would have to do it again if the situation called for it. At this point, Mac realizing that Jim had surpassed him, acknowledged a fear of Jim. Little doubt of Jim's commitment is left when he replied, "I'm stronger than you, Mac, I'm stronger than anything in the world, because I'm going in a straight line." 51 The straight line is that of the Communist Party, a line which leads him in short order to his death. But even after his face had been blown off by a shotgun, Jim's corpse was used by Mac to stir up the strikers once more. 52

Jim's faceless end points out the fact that In Dubious Battle is not a pro-Communist novel. Warren French feels that it is a satire on our society. He says that

Whatever else he might have been, Jim was an earnest and energetic young man, capable of intense dedication to whatever cause he served; it is an indictment of a self-satisfied society that it failed to provide constructive channels for the employment of this energy and sense of dedication. With Swiftian bitterness, Steinbeck satirizes a society that destroys rather than cherishes the chivalric spirit. 53

---

51 Ibid., p. 274.
52 Peter Limca in The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 122, suggests that Jim's faceless end is an indication that he is not important as an individual.
53 French, John Steinbeck, p. 66.
But in addition to satirizing, Steinbeck seems to be saying by Jim's characterization that, in order for men to accomplish anything while working together, they must remain individuals. This Jim did not do. He surrendered himself to the group too completely, and thereby lost his identity.  

The last of the three main characters of In Dubious Battle reflects the idea that Steinbeck is in favor of men working together but opposed to their thinking collectively. Doc Burton is educated, a thinker, aware of the dangers of the group-man, and yet he is not an ideal character. He says of the group that, "I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you." But for all his analytical powers, Doc Burton is neither a happy nor a complete man. He is an individual; despite the fact that he lives in close proximity to the strikers, he is alone. Just prior to his unexplained disappearance, he said, "I don't know; I'm lonely, I guess. I'm awfully lonely. I'm working all alone, towards nothing. There's some compensation for you people. I only hear heartbeats through a stethoscope. You hear them in the air." So it is that in In Dubious Battle we see both sides of the coin. Jim and Mac represent

55Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, pp. 144-145.
56Ibid., p. 256.
one extreme, a complete surrender of body and mind to the group-man. Doc Burton, on the other hand, is a well-educated, and a highly individualistic man; yet he is alone. It would seem that Steinbeck's ideal man would be somewhere between these two extremes.

But however lonely Doc was, his is the most sympathetic portrayal in the novel. Steinbeck, as an author, is creative; he recognizes that there is no human creativeness except that which is accomplished by the individual. In the profile of his friend, Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck said:

There is no creative unit in the human save the individual working alone. In pure creativeness, in art, in music, in mathematics, there are no true collaborations. The creative principle is a lonely [my italics] and individual matter. Groups can correlate, investigate, and build, but we could not think of any group that has ever created or invented anything. Indeed, the first impulse of the group seems to be to destroy the creation and the creator.57

This idea of creativity seems to have been very important to Steinbeck, for he repeated it in nearly the same words in East of Eden. Remarkably alike, the two passages seem to stress the importance of the creative individual:

Our species is the only creative species, and it has only one creative instrument, the individual mind and spirit of a man. Nothing was ever created by two men. There are no good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group can build and extend it, but the group never invents anything. The preciousness lies in the lonely [my italics] mind of a man.58


58 Steinbeck, East of Eden, pp. 113-114.
One should keep in mind that Steinbeck, like Doc Burton, was an objective witness of the migrant workers' condition. He saw their plight while he was writing a series of newspaper articles, later published as Their Blood is Strong. He witnessed the events related therein at approximately the same time that he was writing the novel, In Dubious Battle.

Steinbeck accentuated the notion that to be of any value, the individual must be free of group encumbrances. What seems to be Steinbeck's strongest statement on group-man versus the individual appeared in East of Eden. I let Steinbeck's word stand as the final one on this subject.

And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any ideas, religion, or government which limits or destroys the individual. . . . I will fight . . . to preserve the one thing that separates us from the uncreative beasts.59

59Ibid., p. 114.
LEADERSHIP AND ITS APPLICATION TO IN DUBIOUS BATTLE

John Steinbeck's idea of leadership differs from the usually accepted definition. He indicates that, with few exceptions, the leader of any group is merely the one who happens to be in front. The application of this idea is integral to the study of In Dubious Battle. In The Log from the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck states that, if a leader is lost, he is easily replaced. Thus arises the question of whether or not the strike in In Dubious Battle would have continued had its leaders, Jim and Mac, been killed. In order to answer this question, one must examine Steinbeck's definition of leadership and observe the recurrence of the theme of leadership in his other works.

Although leadership had previously been part of several novels, Steinbeck's nonfictional speculation on leadership appears in The Log from the Sea of Cortez. His concept states that "... the people we call leaders are simply those who, at the given moment, are moving in the direction behind which will be found the greatest weight, and which


\[2\] Ibid.
represents a future mass movement."³ Conversely, that which Steinbeck suggests is the popular notion is the belief "... that those in the forefront are leaders in a given movement and actually direct and consciously lead the masses in the sense that an army corporal orders 'Forward march' and the squad marches ahead."⁴ Steinbeck's concept is analogous to a flock of ducks. If the lead duck is shot, another will take his place, and the flock will continue on its way. On the other hand, the more popular concept is analogous to a train. The locomotive is at the front, but it also provides the force and impetus that keeps the rest of the train moving. In The Moon is Down, Steinbeck employed both the aforementioned types of leadership.⁵ The distinction between his fictional presentation of the two types of leadership helps one to understand the leaders in In Dubious Battle.

John Steinbeck's concept of leadership as he brought it into play in his fiction is closely related to the phalanx theory. There are two divisions. First, when those who are being led are guilty of group-man thinking or, as he sometimes called it, herd thinking, then they may

³Ibid. Peter Lisca uses this passage, along with other evidence, to suggest that the leaders in In Dubious Battle are replaceable; see The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), pp. 118-119. Lester Marks sees this passage as one of the illusions under which the so-called practical men must labor. See "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, Syracuse University), p. 58.


⁶Ibid.
very well be dependent upon the leader. They are especially dependent upon the leader if he is responsible for a large part of the group's thought. Secondly, if a given group of people has, at least, the opportunity for free and original independent thought, then this group could suffer the loss of one or several of its leaders without any great consequences, for within its ranks would be many capable of providing adequate leadership. In short, herd thinkers are dependent upon a particular leader or leaders, whereas those who have the opportunity for individual thought are not.\footnote{For a brief discussion of herd thinking versus free thought, see Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), pp. 116-117.}

In contrasting his idea of leadership with the more generally accepted idea, Steinbeck drew one of his favorite analogies, that of comparing human activities with simple animal life. He compared leadership with the movement of an amoeba as follows:

Finger-like processes \(\text{[of the amoeba]}\), the pseudopodia, extend at various places beyond the confines of the chief mass. Locomotion takes place by means of the animal's flowing into one or into several adjacent pseudopodia. Suppose that the molecules which 'happened' to be situated in the forefront of the pseudopodium through which the animal is progressing, or into which it will have flowed subsequently, should be endowed with consciousness and should say to themselves and to their fellows: 'We are directly leading this great procession, our leadership causes all the rest of the population to move this way, the mass follows the path we blaze.' This would be equivalent to the attitude with which we commonly regard leadership.\footnote{Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, pp. 138-139.}
Yet, however much Steinbeck opposed this "commonly regarded" idea of leadership, he included instances in his fiction, explicitly instances involving herd thinkers, in which this type of leadership occurred. For example, in his short novel of World War II, The Moon is Down, he described a small, northern-European town that was occupied by the Nazis. In a sense, this entire novel is a commentary on the two types of leadership and on the two completely different types of people who were subjected to the two forms of direction. The Nazis represented the herd or group-man, and the citizens of the town represented those who were capable of exercising independent thought. The denouement of the conflict, that is the triumph of the citizens of the town over the Nazis, is itself a commendable comment about freedom of thought, since the free men prevailed over the herd thinkers. Typical of the leadership theme in the novel is this statement by the town's doctor. "They [the Nazis] think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people, and in a time of need leaders pop up among us like mushrooms." Nearly ten years later, in the sketch about his friend, Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck expressed the same idea, this time in terms of the Soviet Union and the United States in addition to Nazi Germany.  

9 Steinbeck, The Moon is Down, p. 107.
10 For two different interpretations of these two similar passages, see Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 189, and Marks, "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novel of John Steinbeck," p. 140.
He said,

Consider . . . the Third Reich or the Politburo-controlled Soviet. The sudden removal of twenty-five key men from either system could cripple it so thoroughly that it would take a long time to recover, if it ever could. . . . Consider the blundering anarchic system of the United States, the stupidity of some of its lawmakers, the violent reaction, the slowness of its ability to change. . . . We could lose our congress, our president, and our general staff and nothing much would have happened. We would go right on.11

But there is one discrepancy which appears in the "Leader of the People" section of The Red Pony. Here the grandfather described the people who made up the westward movement as "one big crawling beast." This description seems to agree with both the phalanx theory and the concept of herd thinking. But, the grandfather went on to say that "I was the leader, but if I hadn't been there, someone else would have been the head. The thing had to have a head."12 If this passage is not an incongruity, the only explanation is that, although all of the people who composed the "beast" wanted to go west, "every man wanted something for himself" to the extent that mobocracy was not in effect. If this restraint from mob action were the case, the people whom the grandfather described were individual thinkers who followed a leader. Although Peter Lisca sees the leader here as "... an expression of the politic . . ."13 he does not comment on the discrepancy in question, and


I can see no conclusive way of determining which of the two possibilities is occurring in regard to the people in the westward movement.

Regardless of whether the leaders in Steinbeck's fiction were replaceable or not, most of them were well-fitted for their jobs. They had the ability to persuade people to do what they wanted. Jim Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath* told that, when he had been a preacher, he had been able to get the people so full of the "Holy Spirit" that they jumped and shouted. Mack, the acknowledged spokesman for the "boys" in *Cannery Row*, was likewise very persuasive. For example, he gained a reluctant farmer's friendship and also permission to hunt frogs by complimenting the farmer's dog. He said that the dog looked "... like Nola that win the field trial in Virginia last year." Of course, Mack knew nothing about dog shows, but his flattery obtained the desired results. As one of his impressed friends said, "I bet Mack could of been the president of the U. S. if he wanted." Mac of *In Dubious Battle* also knew the value of flattering a person by complimenting his dogs. He gained permission to camp on the unwilling Anderson's farm by praising his dogs.

---


16 Ibid., p. 52.

All in all, Mac of *In Dubious Battle* was perhaps Steinbeck's most persuasive leader. His first act upon encountering the dissatisfied workers was to use a difficult childbirth to gain the confidence of workers. He had each man contribute some piece of white clothing to be used in delivering the baby. By doing this, he created a bond among the men; each man had helped in a small way. He created "... a single-minded esprit de corps which [15] helpful to him when the time comes for the strike to begin." But his motives were ulterior; as he explained. "We've got to use whatever material comes to us. That was a lucky break. We simply had to take it. 'Course it was nice to help the girl, but hell, even if it killed her—we've got to use anything." And use anything he did—everything from childbirth to an old man with a broken hip to "regular old camp meeting" speeches to his comrade Joy's funeral to parades, and ultimately, to Jim's faceless corpse at the conclusion of the novel. Marks said of Mac that he "... is a vicious exponent of Machiavellian opportunism," and that he "... goes about his work with a deliberate ruthlessness." Mac's use of corpses and of a pregnant girl whom he easily could have killed was unscrupulous, but he was an effective leader.

---

18 For a somewhat similar but more complete discussion of Mac and his methods, see Marks, "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck," pp. 57-61.


20 Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, p. 60.

21 Marks, "A Study of Thematic Continuity in the Novels of John Steinbeck," p. 58.
But the question remains: if Jim and Mac had both been destroyed, would the strike have continued? Or, would someone else have taken their places as leaders? Certainly, most of this is pure speculation, but Mac, with all his talent, could not and did not maintain mobocracy at all times. During the periods between mob action, individual thought had to occur. And it must be remembered that Jim and Mac were not the final cause of the dissatisfaction and the ensuing strike. They would have been unable to accomplish anything had it not been for the bitterness caused by the low wages. Steinbeck described the unrest that precipitated trouble in *The Grapes of Wrath* as follows: "... in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."\(^{22}\) It would seem from this evidence that Steinbeck felt that the strikes and labor violence would have occurred whether there had been Communist agitators or not. But, if the strikes had all been the results of mob action, it seems unlikely that he could have sympathised with them as he did. That he did so sympathize is evident from this passage, "... fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live—for every little beaten strike is proof that a step is being taken."\(^{23}\) With this in mind, it seems foolish to try to pose an answer to an "if" question, since the strike in *In Dubious*

\(^{22}\)Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 311.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 133.
Battle, whether led by Mac and Jim or by someone else, was probably a success in Steinbeck's eyes.
Ownership and Its Relationship to In Dubious Battle

Basically the migrants and landowners of In Dubious Battle are divided by one thing—ownership of land. Because the main conflict in the novel, the strike, results from conflicting views about ownership, an awareness of Steinbeck's views on the subject should aid the reader of In Dubious Battle.

As will be illustrated, Steinbeck indicated that to possess things is not, in itself, bad. For a simple people, however, ownership can be disastrous; for somewhat more educated people ownership can be good or evil depending upon the emphasis the owner places on the things he owns. Additionally, his fiction implies that too much emphasis on possessions is undesirable. Steinbeck, in his fiction, also seems to say that those who own land must remain close to that land, close in both a physical sense and in an emotional sense. If landowners lose their proximity to their land, they may very well lose the land, too. These are the aspects of the ownership theme that are pertinent in Steinbeck's fiction and, in particular, in In Dubious Battle.

As stated earlier concerning the simple characters in Steinbeck's fiction, possession can be disastrous since it complicates lives. Steinbeck's homely people are not simple of mind so much as they are simple in their wants and needs. Since their lives have been unaffected and uninvolved, it follows quite naturally that the burden of ownership will change their lives. And since Steinbeck idealized the
uncomplicated life, as is made obvious in Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday, it also follows that a change from this simple life is likely to be a change for the worse.

Such is the case of Danny in Tortilla Flat. When he returned from the army, he learned that his grandfather had died and left him two houses. "When Danny heard about it he was a little weighed down with the responsibility of ownership."1 Danny's newly acquired status changed him in the eyes of his friends. In order to avoid social castigation, Danny shared his houses with his friends, and, although they got along rather well during most of the novel, Danny was never as care-free as he had previously been. The houses were a burden, and "... the worry of property was settling on Danny's face. No more in life would that face be free of care. No more would Danny break windows now that he had windows of his own to break."2 The houses are part of what Warren French calls "... the orderly methodical civilization that is closing in on the undisciplined paianos."3 Danny is eventually able to get rid of the houses, but not until they and the society of which they are symbols have sapped his zest for life. In fact Danny's demise certainly seemed hastened by the burden of ownership.

---

2Ibid., p. 28.
But the story of Danny and his paisano friends in Tortilla Flat is a light, nostalgic description of a minority group that obviously pleased Steinbeck, as he made clear in the foreword to the novel. The Pearl, however, is a more serious treatment of a similar theme. Here, the setting is Mexico. The characters are even more unspoiled and lead even less complicated lives than did those in Tortilla Flat. The story, the basis of which Steinbeck relates in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, is a simple one. Kino, a young pearl diver, finds a huge, practically priceless pearl. Suddenly, his simple and happy life is no more. He is exploited by everyone, even the clergy. His home is destroyed and he is forced to kill to keep possession of the pearl. Kino takes his wife and small child and flees his home. They are pursued, much as was Pepe in the short story, "Flight," until Kino kills again. However, before the pursuers were killed, they shot Kino's child. After Kino returns home with his wife and dead child, he throws the valuable pearl back into the bay where he had originally found it. Although Steinbeck used a purportedly true story for the basis for The Pearl, he himself says that it "... seems to be a true story, but it is so much like a parable that it almost can't be. This Indian boy is too heroic, too wise... it is far too reasonable to be true." But however true, the lesson is plain. Ownership can corrupt one, cause him to become a wife-beater, a killer, an outcast, and can destroy

---


5 Ibid., p. 103.
one's home and family. If possessions have this corrupting influence, Steinbeck makes clear, the only recourse is to get rid of the possessions.

The possession that was of chief concern to Steinbeck, particularly during the social upheaval of the 1930's, was land. Land was something special, and those who owned it owed a special allegiance to it. Usually, after the owners lived on the land for a time, they lost their feeling for it. According to Steinbeck this loss was part of a cycle. The owners of land were continually caught up in this cycle and estranged from their land. This cycle, which Steinbeck calls "the routine of changing domination," is related to the biological concept of the survival of the fittest. It is, nevertheless, concerned mainly with ownership and possession. Because of its particular importance to In Dubious Battle, a long quotation from The Log from the Sea of Cortez on the subject seems justified here.

One can think of the attached and dominant human who has captured the place, the property, and the security. He dominates his area. To protect it, he has police who know him and who are dependent on him for a living. He is protected by good clothing, good houses, and good food. He is protected even against illness. One would say that he is safe, that he would have many children, and that his seed would in a short time litter the world. But in his fight for dominance he has pushed out others of his species who were not so fit to dominate, and perhaps these have become wanderers, improperly clothed, ill fed, having no security and no fixed base. These should really perish, but the reverse seems true. The dominant human, in his security, grows soft and fearful. He spends a great part of his time in protecting himself. . . . The lean and hungry grow strong, and the strongest of them are selected out. Having nothing to lose and all to gain, these selected hungry and rapacious ones develop attack rather than defense techniques, and become strong in them, so that one day the dominant
man is eliminated and the strong and hungry takes his place. And the routine is repeated.

Much of Steinbeck's best fiction is built around the cycle herein stated explicitly. The struggle of the dominant human with the hungry human constitutes the essence of In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath. Variations of the cycle are evident in the castigation of the established middle class in Tortilla Flat, The Pearl, Cannery Row, The Winter of Our Discontent, and others. Truly, this concept was one of Steinbeck's most fertile as is demonstrated by the ubiquity of class struggle and criticism of the bourgeoisie in his fiction.

As is evident in the cycle, the period of transition when the once weak, now strong, have not yet replaced the established people in their positions provides some of the most interesting aspects of Steinbeck's novels. The displaced people desire to possess. Often they dream of the future. The Okies in The Grapes of Wrath dreamed of the oranges and warm sun of California. Much of Of Mice and Men was centered around George and Lennie's dream of a little farm where they could raise alfalfa and rabbits. When Steinbeck's characters were denied fulfillments of their modest dreams, they were confused, but in the novels concerned with labor strife, they grew stronger.

The landless felt an attachment for the land. The Okies found it difficult to leave their Oklahoma farms even though they knew that they could not have survived if they had stayed. When they arrived in

6Ibid., p. 95.
California, they found it incomprehensible that the owners there often did not even live on the land. California's "routine of changing domination" makes up most of the nineteenth chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath*; it is there that Steinbeck divulges many insights about the ownership theme. California, Steinbeck tells us, belonged to Mexico until "a horde of tattered feverish Americans" drove the weaker Mexicans out because the Mexicans "... could not resist, because they wanted nothing in the world as frantically as the Americans wanted land." But the Americans grew weak and lost the "feral hunger" for the land. After they did so, the poorer ones lost their land until the farms were large and the farmers few. This trend continued until "... it came about that owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it." On the other hand, Steinbeck said of the Okies that

They were hungry, and they were fierce. And they had hoped to find a home, and they found only hatred. Okies—the owners hated them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry; and perhaps the owners had heard from their grandfathers how easy it is to steal land from a soft man if you are fierce and hungry and armed. The owners hated them.

---

7 *Ibid.*. The application of the term, "the routine of changing domination" to *The Grapes of Wrath* is my device, not Steinbeck's.


But it remains that, if one is to complete Steinbeck's cycle, there can be no doubt that the owners of both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* would fight a losing defensive battle, and that the Okies and strikers would replace them as owners. This answers the charge that neither book resolves anything, particularly the condition of the migrant workers.

It is an interesting sidelight of Steinbeck's works that many possessions on which the owners placed values out of proportion with the actual values were often destroyed by fire. In the early novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*, Richard Whiteside having moved to California, built a strong house that he felt would serve his descendants for generations. His only son, John, valued the house too highly. "It was the outer shell of his body. Just as his mind could leave his body and go traveling off, so could he leave the house, but just as surely he must come back to it." But the house was to be a cause of misery for him. He, like his father, had only one child, a son. It was John's desire that his son continue and enlarge the family in the solid, white house. His son, Bill, had other ideas. He married and took his bride to live in Monterey. Shortly thereafter, John Whiteside burned brush, the fire got out of hand, and the family mansion burned to the ground.

---

11 Theodore Pollock summarizes such criticism by saying that some readers find the end of *The Grapes of Wrath* "... either offensively sentimental or not really an ending at all." From "On the Ending of *The Grapes of Wrath,*" *Modern Fiction Studies*, IV (Summer, 1958), 177-178.

John did nothing to stop the fire once it had started. It was as if he had valued the house too much, and the fire purged him of ownership.

John Whiteside's story, which has a parallel in the interpolated twenty-first chapter of *Cannery Row*, is also quite similar to Danny's aforementioned experience with the houses in *Tortilla Flat*. Although Danny did not place much value on his two houses, his friends did. It was they who suffered a loss when the first house, the one in which they had been living, was completely destroyed by flames. Danny, in contrast, felt "... relief that at least one of his burdens was removed."13 But after Danny's death, his friends became the owners, albeit unwillingly, of Danny's other house. The house caused them to be sad for it reminded them of their old friend, Danny. And so, when the second house burned, "they sat and smiled."14

In the highly mystical novel, *To a God Unknown*, Joseph Wayne, upon first seeing the valley in which he was to make his home, felt an intense, even sexual need for the land. Steinbeck, probably influenced and inspired by Freud, described his protagonist as follows:

His possessiveness became a passion. 'It's mine,' he chanted. 'Down deep it's mine, right to the center of the world.' He stamped his feet into the soft earth. Then the exultance grew to be a sharp pain of desire that ran through his body in a hot river. He flung himself face downward on the grass and pressed his cheek against the wet stems. His fingers gripped the wet grass and tore it, gut, and gripped again. His thighs beat heavily on the earth.15

13Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat*, p. 82.
14Ibid., p. 316.
There is little doubt that Joseph Wayne's was an excessive desire for possession, but he could not be purged of his land by literally burning it. Nevertheless, the land, his ranch, was burned—burned by an unrelenting sun. The example of Joseph Wayne differs from those previously cited inasmuch as he suffered the loss of his ranch so deeply that he committed suicide.

Of course, not all highly valued possessions in John Steinbeck's fiction were destroyed by fire. Jody in The Red Pony lost his pony to sickness and the buzzards, and Kino in The Pearl threw the pearl into the bay. It should be pointed out that Kino's house was burned as a result of his having the valuable pearl. But generally, Steinbeck's technique of having meaningful possessions destroyed by fire was also used in In Dubious Battle.

The ownership theme plays a significant part in the interpretation of In Dubious Battle. A. H. Grommon suggests that a series of steps and questions be used in explicating literature. In one of his steps he states that one should go to outside sources, that is to the context or environment out of which a work is taken; in another of Grommon's procedures he recommends that one be aware of the major conflict and the outcome of that conflict in any literary work. The previously quoted "routine of changing domination" follows these suggestions. It first of all comes from an outside source that is part of

---

16 A. H. Grommon, "Who is the Leader of the People?" English Journal, XLVIII (November, 1959), 449-456.

17 Ibid., p. 461.
the context of Steinbeck's writing. Secondly, and more important as far as *In Dubious Battle* is concerned, the "routine of changing domination" resolves, or at least suggests, a resolution for the strike which is the main conflict in the novel. One, of course, need not accept "the routine of changing domination" as the only explanation for the outcome of the strike, but it is a plausible one. If Steinbeck says in a nonfictional work "... that one day the dominant man is eliminated and the strong and hungry takes his place," there seems to be little reason for not pointing out a similar statement in *In Dubious Battle*.

The loss of favorite possessions by burning recurs in *In Dubious Battle* as well. This device seems to have particular significance in this novel since, in each case, the owner is a striker or a sympathizer of the strikers, but the owner lets the possession come between him and the movement. Perhaps the destruction of possessions is Steinbeck's manner of punishment for those who were too caught up by materialism. At any rate, it seems unlikely that the burnings were totally unrelated.

The first such instance of this involved the owner of a lunch counter. Al Anderson, who seems to be a model for the lunch-counter cook also called Al in chapter fourteen of *The Grapes of Wrath*, gave free meals to the strikers, sympathized with their efforts, but refused to actively support the strike because he feared repercussions from the nonstrikers against himself and his lunch wagon. He obviously took a

---

18 Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, p. 95.
great deal of pride in his establishment, and at one point said, "Well, I'd be out with you guys if I didn't have a business to keep up." This partial involvement is rewarded with a burned lunch wagon, six broken ribs, and a loss of eighteen hundred dollars. But Al Anderson was changed by his experience; his loss confirmed his feelings, and he promised to become a Communist worker.

Al Anderson's father was involved in a somewhat similar incident. The elder Anderson, reluctant to become involved in the strike at first, became involved chiefly because of his heightened interest in two possessions.

The first possession was a pair of English pointers. Because of Anderson's pride in his dogs, Mac was able to gain his confidence. The second possession was his unharvested crop of apples. Anderson's worry about the ripe apples not being harvested coupled with his flattery over his dogs allowed Mac to persuade him to let the strikers camp on his farm. Anderson's action in turn caused the other crop growers to be resentful of the elder Anderson. Anderson was never in favor of the strike; he merely wanted his apples picked. Perhaps it was because of this concern with his possessions and his lack of total commitment that Steinbeck had him punished. As it turned out, Anderson's barn containing both his harvested apples and his prized dogs was burned by his fellow fruit growers. But Anderson, unlike his son Al, underwent

---

no change of heart because of his experience. In fact, he was less in favor of the workers and their strike after the fire than he had been before.

Perhaps the most striking example of excessive emphasis on possessions in *In Dubious Battle* involved a man called Dakin whom Mac had hand picked to be the outward leader of the strikers (it should be remembered that Mac was the actual leader at all times). Dakin's possessions fell into three categories—his wife, his children, and his light truck. It is evident at the time that Dakin is introduced that the last of his possessions, the truck, was the thing that he valued most highly. He was reluctant to become involved in the strike at first. His reason was "a wife and kids and a truck." But shortly thereafter, he seemingly forgot the wife and children, for he said, "I don't like to get mixed up in nothing like this. I got a light truck." 20

During the portion of the novel in which Dakin was an instrumental character, Steinbeck repeatedly calls the reader's attention to Dakin's truck and his pride in owning it. After Dakin had joined the camp of striking men, Steinbeck described a hundred or so cars all of which, except for Dakin's truck, were very old. The description went as follows:

At one end of the line of cars stood Dakin's Chevrolet truck, clean and new and shiny. Alone of all the cars it was in good condition; and Dakin, as he walked about the camp, surrounded by members of his committee, rarely got out of sight of his

---

20Ibid., pp. 80-81.
truck. As he talked or listened his cold, seared eyes went again and again to his shining green truck.²¹

At times, Dakin openly referred to the superiority of his truck to the automobiles of the other strikers. Once, when it was necessary that a number of the men leave the camp, Dakin said, "I'm goin' in my truck. . . . We better leave these damn old cans [the other cars] here."²²

But his excessive pride was not long-lived.

Mac had originally chosen Dakin to be his figurehead because he appeared to be calm, reserved. Mac said that "... Dakin don't look like a guy that would ever get mad." London, another of the strikers' hierarchy, concurred with Mac by saying that Dakin "never opens up his eyes wide; never lets his voice get loose. The worse things gets, the quieter Dakin gets."²³ But Dakin maintained his calm exterior only as long as his truck was intact. When this favorite possession, like so many others in Steinbeck's fiction, was destroyed by fire, Dakin became frenzied with rage. After a group of vigilantes had burned his truck and were threatening him with guns, Dakin reacted in the following manner:

He turns white, and then he turns blue. Then he lets out a howl like a coyote and starts for 'em. They shoot him in the leg, but that don't stop him. When he can't run any more, he crawls for 'em, slavered around the mouth like a mad dog--just nuts, he just went nuts! I guess he loved that truck better'n anything in the world.²⁴

²¹Ibid., p. 136. ²²Ibid., p. 158. ²³Ibid., p. 126. ²⁴Ibid., p. 185.
This reductio of a calm man to an enraged, animal-like being probably is Steinbeck's method of denouncing materialism. And perhaps the inclusion of Dakin and his truck in *In Dubious Battle* is Steinbeck's manner of demonstrating that the strikers cannot be successful without ridding themselves of the same blight of ownership and materialism that the established landowners were guilty of. The only deep feeling for possessions permitted by Steinbeck was toward land. But he later, as will be shown, had doubts about even this.

Twenty-five years after the publication of *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck stated that "Perhaps we have overrated roots as a psychic need." If one dispenses with the editorial "we," he might conclude that Steinbeck is saying that perhaps he overrated roots as a psychic need. Steinbeck has probably mellowed with age, but, if he had not once felt that the need for roots was a basic drive for dispossessed peoples, it is unlikely that *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* would ever have been written.

VI

NON-TELEOLOGY AND IN DURIOUS BATTLE

John Steinbeck, as an adherent of non-teleological thought, believed that conditions and institutions of any historical period should not be regarded as effects of any particular causes. That they exist is, according to Steinbeck, the only significant thing, since the non-teleological approach to thought "... has no bearing on what might be or could be if so-and-so happened. It merely considers conditions 'as is.'"¹ Such an acceptance of what "is" constitutes the essence of non-teleology. Steinbeck clearly illustrated non-teleological thought in The Log from the Sea of Cortez by applying it to the unemployment problem which was of paramount importance during the troubled 1930's.² It was supposed that those out of work lacked initiative. As a non-teleologist, Steinbeck argued that, because there were simply not enough jobs to go around, there had to be a given number of people out of work. He accepted the jobless since he did not regard their condition as an effect of their purported laziness or indolence. He went on to say that, although the people without jobs probably did represent the lowest stratum of our society, those with jobs have no right to look down on the jobless. He explained this


²In fact, Steinbeck devoted nearly all of Chapter 14 of The Log from the Sea of Cortez to a discussion of teleology and non-teleology.
position by saying that, if the nonworking were suddenly to become aggressive and ambitious, and, if by doing so, they were able to obtain jobs, they would merely supplant a number of working people. The ratio of employed to unemployed would not change. Steinbeck, therefore, accepted the unemployed since "... they are where they are 'because' natural conditions are what they are. And so far as we selfishly are concerned we can rejoice that they, rather than we, represent the low extreme, since there must be one." Steinbeck chose the example of the unemployed with good reason, for most of his superior fiction, i.e., In Dubious Battle, Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, and Cannery Row, portray the poor and jobless sympathetically.

In my opinion, Steinbeck's thinking directly opposes teleology, a method of thought that attempts to explain things in terms of causes and effects. He said that

this kind of thinking considers changes and cures—what 'should be' in the terms of an end pattern... it presumes the bettering of conditions, often, unfortunately, without achieving more than a most superficial understanding of those conditions.

Steinbeck, then, is opposed to those who would change things without a thorough understanding of the things which they are changing. This opposition raises an interesting question in regard to In Dubious Battle.

The strikers of In Dubious Battle undoubtedly knew little of the economic system that was, at least in part, responsible for their

---

3 Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. 133.

4 ibid., pp. 134-135.
undesirable condition. Yet, they were trying to bring about a change. The strikers were labor reformers. Are these characters of Steinbeck and those of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* all of whom were, during the course of their respective novels, trying to change their economic conditions—are these people teleological thinkers? At first glance, it seems they are. The following statement from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* seems to support this interpretation.

In their sometimes intolerant refusal to face facts as they are, teleological notions may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change conditions which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding-acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change which might still be indicated.\(^5\)

If the strikers of *In Dubious Battle*, the Okies of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Lennie and George of *Of Mice and Men* are teleological thinkers, it is unlikely that Steinbeck sympathized with them. That the foregoing situation is true, I submit, is not the case.

There are two types of people in Steinbeck’s fiction who try to effect changes. One type consists of teleological thinkers; the other type consists of non-teleological thinkers. It is the first of these two types that Steinbeck does not seem to approve of. They are ones who feel compelled to interfere messianically in the lives of others. They interfere even though their interference is usually unwanted. Examples of this type of character abound in Steinbeck’s fictional work.

Probably the best example of teleological interferers occurs in the novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*. Indeed, if it were not for a family

---

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 135.
of teleologists called the Munroes. The Pastures of Heaven would not be a novel at all, but ten separate and unrelated stories. The Munroes' teleological interference in the lives of the families of the valley is the only unifying element in the novel other than the setting. And always, their interference brings disaster. An examination of two of their fiascos should help to illustrate Steinbeck's treatment of teleology in his fiction.

The fourth chapter of The Pastures of Heaven concerns an eleven-year-old idiot named Tularecito. Ordinarily, Tularecito was quite harmless; in fact, he was useful, for he could make a garden, milk cows, break horses, and train dogs without using force. He was required by the law, another unreasonable teleological instrument, to attend school. When the teacher read stories about fairies and gnomes, the simple Tularecito interpreted the gnomes as being his people. He started to search for them. Later, when the teacher told him that he could find them only at night, he began to dig holes at night in hope of finding his people. He made one mistake—he dug in Bert Munroe's orchard. Munroe filled in Tularecito's holes until Tularecito, angry and unable to understand, hit him with a shovel. As a result, Tularecito was sent to an asylum for the criminal insane. That Steinbeck sympathizes with Tularecito and others like him, e.g., Lennie in Of Mice and Men and

6 Harry T. Moore called the Munroes "the jinx of the valley" in his The Novels of John Steinbeck (Chicago: Normandie House, 1939), p. 21.

Frankie in **Cannery Row**, is obvious from the way in which they are presented in their respective novels. **Lincoln Gibbs**, in speaking of Steinbeck's eccentrics, his half-wits, and his insane, said that "his treatment of these is sometimes exaggerative and melodramatic—but there is no question of the genuineness of his sympathy." In each of the aforementioned cases, the simpleton was a well-meaning creature who, because of one act, was reproved by society. One can infer that Steinbeck resents Munroe, since Munroe was a **teetotaller**, either consciously or subconsciously, and was continually bringing about changes in the idyllic status quo.

Another example of the Munroes' interference occurs in the seventh chapter of **The Pastures of Heaven**. This chapter involved the two Lopez sisters, Rosa and Maria, who opened a small business to sell **tortillas and enchiladas**. But their business did not do well until the sisters began to **prostitute themselves** in order to attract customers. They were not, however, **prostitutes** in their own minds, since the only thing for which they **accepted** money was their excellent Spanish food. **Steinbeck** made it clear that they were merely simple people doing what they had to do to maintain their business. **Harry Moore** said of the sisters that they "... will never sell their favors for the coin of the realm and are insulted if they are offered 'the money of shame'... but they will **give themselves** joyously to the man who appreciates their

---

... enchiladas enough to buy extra amounts of them."^9 Steinbeck also pointed out quite clearly that the sisters were religious, at least as religious as they could be with their simple minds. Daniel R. Brown explains their religion as "... a mixture ... of orthodox Catholicism and folk tales."^10 He continues by saying that, since they do not understand the conventions and teachings of the Church, they "... will religiously go to church every week and still give themselves to their tortilla-buying customers at other times without a sense of a contradiction of values."^11 Although they differed from the norm, the Lopez sisters were another example of something that "is." The teleological-minded Munroes changed everything. Bert Munroe started a fallacious rumor about a man's running off with one of the Lopez sisters that eventually caused the sheriff to close the sisters' establishment. The episode ends with the two sisters, not knowing how else to support themselves, going off to San Francisco to become prostitutes, the kind they called "bad women."

And so it is throughout The Pastures of Heaven. In each of the episodes, save the one directly concerned with themselves, the Munroes made brief but disastrous appearances. Nine times in the novel, they disrupted the lives of their neighbors with their teleological meddling.

---

^9Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck, p. 20.


^11Ibid.
The Munroes did not want to cause trouble. For the most part, their intentions were good. But it is just this type of interference that Steinbeck takes to task in his fiction. Even characters whom Steinbeck represented favorably were not successful when they temporarily became teleological do-gooders.

Danny and his friends of *Tortilla Flat* are examples of sympathetically portrayed characters who failed at goodhearted attempts to change things. In the eighth chapter of *Tortilla Flat*, Steinbeck tells of a Senora Cortez and her eight children who managed very well while eating nothing but beans. One year the bean crop failed, and Danny and his group decided not to let Senora Cortez and her family starve. However, they tried too hard. Instead of providing the usual fare of beans, Danny and company provided meat, vegetables, and other luxuries. The results were calamitous. As Senora Cortez herself put it,

"Green things and fruit are not good for children," she explained. "Milk is constipating to a baby after it is weaned." She pointed to the flushed and irritable children. *See, they were all sick. They were not getting the proper food.*

The proper food was, of course, beans. Danny and his group of friends realized their mistake and corrected it. They supplied Senora Cortez and her eight children with four large sacks of beans.

Incidents similar to Danny's helping Senora Cortez occur between Doc and the boys of the Palace Flophouse in both *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* (the setting and major characters of the two novels are

---

practically identical). In *each* of these novels the boys become, from
time to time, overemotional about their friend and benefactor, Doc.

As Mack said in the first chapter of *Cannery Row*, "That Doc is a fine
fellow. We ought to do something for him." Their usual method of
expressing gratitude is to give a party. In both novels, the prepara-
tion for the parties and the parties themselves provide most of the
movement. The parties, while gala affairs, usually were unhappy for
Doc. They, too, were well-meant failures.

The paisanos of *Tortilla Flat* and the well-meaning bums of *Cann-
ery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* were not consistently interveners. For the
most part, they led simple lives of non-taleological acceptance. The
teleologists of whom Steinbeck wrote in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*
are those such as the Munroes in *The Pastures of Heaven*, Curley and his
wife in *Of Mice and Men*, the landowners in *In Dubious Battle* and *The
Grapes of Wrath*, and Margie Young-Hunt in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

But how do the migrant workers of *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and
Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* differ from the true teleologists? First,
although both groups wanted changes, the teleologists such as the Mun-
roes felt a need to change the lives of others. The migrants were con-
cerned with improving only their own lives. Secondly, Steinbeck wrote
that

Non-taleological ideas derive through 'is' thinking, associated
with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it.
They imply depth, fundamentalism, and clarity—seeing beyond

---

p. 8.
traditional or personal projections. They consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than as results. ... Since it is likely that Steinbeck favored the strike, he probably regarded the changes that the strikers of In Dubious Battle were working for and the strike itself as outgrowths. Although the strikers were too simple to consider themselves consciously as non-teleological thinkers, they were acting in accordance with natural selection. Their action is closely akin to "the routine of changing domination" mentioned in Chapter IV. The strikers are working for a change, but Steinbeck doubtless felt that the change was an "outgrowth" or an "expression" rather than an effect of a certain cause. Non-teleology is not opposed to those changes which evolve naturally. Warren French supports this idea by saying that Steinbeck actually wants a change in The Grapes of Wrath. French says that Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking is apparent in his unvarnished portrait of the unloveliness of the Okies; something should be done about the migrants' situation, he maintains, not because for any preconceived reasons it shouldn't exist, but because its existence menaces the health of the culture. 

As far as Steinbeck, as an author and observer of life, is concerned, non-teleology provided an approach to writing whereby he could remain objective. In agreement with this observation Antonia Seixas, his former secretary and wife of his friend, Ed Ricketts, said of Steinbeck that "...he is like an entomologist describing the antics of a

group of insects; he neither praises nor blames.  

16 This objectivity can be seen in characters such as Danny of Tortilla Flat. Usually these objective people are the ones whom Steinbeck seemed to favor. For example, Jim Casy reflected non-teleology in The Grapes of Wrath when he said,

There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice and some ain't, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.  

Steinbeck's non-teleology can also be seen in Samuel Hamilton in East of Eden of whom it was said, "You are one of the rare people who can separate your observation from your preconceptions. You see what is, where most people see what they expect."  

18 Doc of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday showed that he was a non-teleologist by his acceptance of all kinds of people, including the prostitutes who were his neighbors. The characters of The Wayward Bus display Doc's non-teleology. Frederick Bracher said of them that they "... all share the main 'non-teleological' virtue: the ability to see what 'is'..."  

19

---


nearly all of Steinbeck's significant works, one character reflects non-telological thinking.

In *In Dubious Battle* Doc Burton, who seems to reflect Steinbeck's thinking, is such a character. "Although Steinbeck has denied any autobiographical connection with Doc Burton, it is evident that many passages in *Sea of Cortez* . . . are but further developments of Burton's ideas. . . ."²⁰ Burton reflected Steinbeck's objectivity by saying that

I want to see the whole picture—as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of 'good' and 'bad,' and limit my vision. If I used the term 'good' on a thing I'd lose my license to inspect it, because there might be bad in it. Don't you see? I want to be able to look at the whole thing.²¹

Bracher recognized Burton's acceptance. He said of Burton that "he 'believes' in the cause in the same way that he believes in the moon—it is."²² To believe in the cause and the strike because they exist seems to be Steinbeck's view as well. But as we have seen Steinbeck ultimately came to believe that the strike was part of a cycle. Steinbeck believes that his cycle came true, for he was recently quoted as saying that "Today the Okies of the 1930's are not only settled, they own land in California . . ."²³ In this sense, the strike was dubious.

---

²⁰Peter Lisa, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 120.


²²Bracher, "Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," p. 188.

as the title suggests, but the "whole picture" was not. The strikers
would and did eventually win out as Steinbeck, I believe, realized in
the 1930's.

But one encounters difficulty when he tries to extend non-
teleological thought to a logical extreme—he has to find a need for a
change somewhere. Alfred Kazin belittled Steinbeck's thought by saying
that it "... is not so much a philosophy as an excuse for not having
one..." Steinbeck himself seems to have recognized this incon-
sistency in recent years, for he has begun to advocate change: he
"... cannot quite square his non-teleological observation that people
are what they are with his transcendental desire that they improve them-
selves." For example, in a letter to Adlai Stevenson in 1960, Stein-
beck wrote "... I am troubled by the cynical immorality of my
country. I don't think it can survive on this basis and unless some
kind of catastrophe strikes us, we are lost." He went on to say that
he proposed to do something about the country's immorality. The fol-
lowing year, he published The Winter of Our Discontent which deals
with the same type of immorality that Steinbeck had mentioned to Stevenson.

The Winter of Our Discontent is a type of Faustian story in which
the protagonist, Ethan Allen Hawley, sells his integrity for wealth. If

24Alfred Kazin, "The Unhappy Man From Happy Valley," New York


26Adlai Stevenson and John Steinbeck, "Our 'Rigged' Morality,"
Coronet, XLVII (March, 1960), 147.
one considers the novel from Ethan Hawley's point of view, he could say it is basically non-teleological, since, if Ethan had accepted his lowly position, he would have been spiritually better off. But if one considers The Winter of Our Discontent from what is clearly Steinbeck's point of view, he would have to say that the book is an attack on a decadent morality. One can safely say that Steinbeck is attacking a shaky morality, since nearly every character in the novel (Ethan's wife and daughter are the only two notable exceptions) is either involved in or condones some kind of moral double standard. Ethan, after his fall from innocence, typifies the moral sickness to which Steinbeck objects by saying, "A crime is something someone else commits." Steinbeck, then, returned to the genre of the reform novel. But The Winter of Our Discontent differs from In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath in regard to the conditions which are subject to reform. The reform novels of the 1930's dealt with the physical conditions of their characters; Steinbeck, in The Winter of Our Discontent, deals for the first time with morality, specifically with a proposed change in morality.

Graft, corruption, and payola are not the only moral issues with which the "modern" John Steinbeck is concerned. A proponent of civil rights, he has written a magazine article criticizing whites who expect Negroes to perform superiorly, and, at the same time, not to complain if they, the Negroes, are treated as inferiors. Steinbeck expanded his


views on the racial issue in his travelogue, *Travels With Charley*, in which he said, "I must admit that cruelty and force exerted against weakness turn me sick with rage. . . ."²⁹ Not only was he enraged with the racists of New Orleans and elsewhere in the South, he was also filled "... with a shocked and sickened sorrow."³⁰ This is no picture of an objective biologist. He himself said that his description of racial strife in New Orleans was "... not written to amuse me."³¹ What was his purpose? It seems to me that the only inference one can make is that he desired a change. The racial problem in *Travels With Charley* differs from the reforms of the novels of the '30's in that it, too, like the presentation of a corrupt society in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, is a moral issue; public morality was not of much concern to Steinbeck in the 1930's.

There is another indication in *Travels With Charley* that demonstrates Steinbeck's movement away from non-teleological acceptance. As he put it, "I interfered in a family matter that was none of my business."³² And although he had not wanted to interfere, he admitted the possibility that his interposition could have unpleasant results.³³

³⁰Ibid., p. 256.
³¹Ibid., p. 258.
³²Ibid., p. 175.
³³Ibid.
This, too, is a far cry from the non-teleological "hands off" attitude to which he had once subscribed. Perhaps these instances are indications that in the future, John Steinbeck will be less willing to accept improprieties that he once accepted.
CONCLUSIONS

This study examined four recurring themes in Steinbeck's fiction and nonfiction, but discussed the themes more fully in connection with *In Dubious Battle*. Such a study reveals that this recurrence of themes is an integral part of Steinbeck's works. Also, there seems to be no study in Steinbeckian criticism which traces themes for the purpose of better understanding one, specific novel.

Before the themes were examined and related to *In Dubious Battle*, Chapter II examined criticism relevant to this study. This examination was made to demonstrate to the reader both the criticism available and the differences of opinion that exist within the criticism.

A section of the present investigation, Chapter III, examined the phalanx theory. Here, the reader can see Steinbeck's views on the phalanx theory as presented in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, views which indicate that individuals are but cells in a larger being. Chapter III also discussed whether Steinbeck's characters act like animals or beings with higher intelligence. This chapter suggested that the latter is the case. This section discussed the relationship of the phalanx theory to *In Dubious Battle*, and, finally, suggested that Steinbeck's probable ideal character is the creative individual.

The reader of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* discovers that Steinbeck divided leaders into two classes, the leaders of free men and the leaders of herd thinkers. Chapter IV examined these two divisions.
as evidenced in Steinbeck's fiction in order to demonstrate the recurrence of the theme of leadership. It discussed the leaders of the strike in *In Dubious Battle*, and suggested that the strike would have occurred without these particular directors. The reader can better evaluate the importance of Steinbeck's leaders if he, the reader, is aware of Steinbeck's fictional and nonfictional comments on those who lead groups.

Chapter V considered the theme of ownership. Again, this thesis presented Steinbeck's attitude as expressed in the nonfictional *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* together with such aspects of the theme as ownership of land, the possession of property by simple, unaffected people, and the destruction of possession by fire. The examination of ownership in this study provided a possible answer to the charge that neither *In Dubious Battle* nor *The Grapes of Wrath* resolve anything. This answer, built around what Steinbeck called the "routine of changing domination," indicated that the migrant workers will eventually win in their struggle with the landowners. Finally, Chapter V considered ownership in *In Dubious Battle*.

The last theme which this thesis considered is non-teleology. Non-teleological thinking, which generally accepts things as they are and opposes change, questions whether Steinbeck, as a non-teleologist, can logically favor the strikers of *In Dubious Battle*. After a presentation of teleological and non-teleological thought first in the nonfiction, then in the fiction, this study provided the reader with a
possible answer to the question by explaining that the strikers can
work for a change that evolves naturally without becoming teleologists.

While this study intended primarily to aid the reader of In
Dubious Battle, it also pointed out themes important to the reader of
other of Steinbeck's novels. But perhaps more important, this thematic
study demonstrated the necessity of wide familiarity with an author's
works in order to see the recurrent themes as well as to understand
more fully any one work written by that author.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources by John Steinbeck Used in Preparing This Study


---


---


---


---


---

"Dubious Battle in California," The Nation, CXII (September 12, 1936), 302-304.

---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


Critical Sources Cited in This Study


Calverton, V. F. "Left-Wing Literature in America," English Journal, XX (December, 1931), 789-798.


_____. "John Steinbeck, Californian," Antioch Review, II (Fall, 1947), 345-362.


Grommon, A. H. "Who is the Leader of the People?" *English Journal.* XLVIII (November, 1959), 449-456.


Jones, Claude E. "Proletarian Writing and John Steinbeck," *Sewanee Review.* XLVIII (October, 1940), 445-456.


"The Old Steinbeck," Newsweek, LXV (June 26, 1961), 96.


"The Californians: Storm and Steinbeck," New Republic, CIII (December 9, 1940), 784-787.

Other Sources

"Assisting John Steinbeck," Newsweek, XLVII (June 25, 1956), 56.


Buckingham, L. H. "Development of Social Attitudes Through Literature," School and Society, LII (November 9, 1940), 446-459.


Dougherty, Charles T. "The Christ-Figure in The Grapes of Wrath," College English, XXIV (December, 1962), 224-226.


