MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND IN FOUR NOVELS
BY JOHN STEINBECK: TO A GOD UNKNOWN,
OF MICE AND MEN, THE GRAPES OF
WRATH, AND EAST OF EDEN

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INTRODUCTION

"Who owns the land?" and "How much does one individual own?" are questions which have been present since time immemorial. Political and economic systems were developed in response to man's need for answers to these questions. The answers determined by such systems have greatly affected man socially, psychologically, and morally.

These questions concerning the land have been common to most of the peoples of this earth, as most national literatures bear witness. But since this monograph deals with John Steinbeck, an American novelist, our concern here is with American attitudes toward land and how these attitudes have influenced our national literature.

Henry Nash Smith, in Virgin Land,¹ gives a detailed analysis of how American attitudes toward the land in the contiguous United States, except that east of the Alleghenies, have influenced our history and our literature.

Nineteenth-century Americans, considering themselves a favored people, tenaciously believed that their manifest destiny was to settle the contiguous land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and, by so doing, form a passage to India, which would afford them a lucrative trade. This concrete

¹Henry N. Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1950). [The material in pages 1-4 presents a summary of Mr. Smith's conclusions, especially as they relate to American literature.]
attitude toward nature, which differed from the eighteenth-century belief that nature is a force permeating the physical universe, is reflected in Whitman's "Passage to India," although he sees God's final purpose as connecting the peoples of the world and restoring man's lost harmony with nature.

The mood of primitivism, implying an inherent wickedness in civilization and a pristine purity in untouched nature, occurs in much American literature dealing with the Wild West in the early nineteenth century, especially in Cooper's Leatherstocking tales. Although Emerson considered the quest vain, maintaining that primitive man had no more root in the deep world than civilized man, his contemporaries, Thoreau and Melville, at some point in their careers at least toyed with the idea. Thoreau indulged in primitivism in that he found a supreme good in the trackless wilderness. Melville could as a young writer maintain the nobility of savagery and the untamed wild, although he ultimately came to view nature as ambiguous.

After Cooper's Leatherstocking, the fictional Western heroes began a rapid course of degeneration. From symbols of anarchic freedom as trappers and hunters, they deteriorated into Indian fighters, no longer looking to God through nature and no longer viewing nature as benign. Then, as heroes of the dime novel, they further degenerated into self-reliant, two-gun enemies of nature. Eventually, transformed into detectives, they ceased to be Western in any significant sense.

But the forces destined to control the future did not originate in the Wild West; they originated in the domesticated,
agricultural West that lay behind it. This West became one of the dominate symbols of nineteenth-century American society. The following ideas were widely current in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America:  

1. Every man has a natural right to land.  
2. Cultivating the earth confers a valid title to it.  
3. Landownership gives man social status and dignity.  
4. His constant contact with nature makes him virtuous and happy.  
5. America is a society embodying these traits.  
6. Government should be dedicated to the interest of the freehold farmers.  

After Franklin, the best known expositors of these ideas were Thomas Jefferson and St. John de Crevecoeur. However, by 1830, two agrarianisms had developed in America: a Southern agrarianism, expressed in a pastoral literature of the plantation, and a Northwestern agrarianism, expressed in the myth of the garden of the world with the yeoman as its focal point. The Western yeoman became a symbol which bore an unlimited charge of meaning, having strong overtones of patriotism and implying a far-reaching social theory. Eventually, forces within the country established that the myth of the garden was to control the new developing West.  

The influence of the myth of the garden was not restricted to American literature; it was just as much a shaper of American historical and political thought. Perhaps the most influential non-fictional writing about the West in the nineteenth century was Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in which he contended that the existence of
free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development.

In 1860, the Republicans, politically using the myth of the garden to capture the imagination of the Western farmers, demanded free homesteads for actual settlers. The passage of the Homestead Act resulted in the serious overpopulation of the Western land, which continued until the drought of the 1930's turned a large portion of the plains into a dust bowl. Although the Act, because of natural forces and the forces of the Industrial Revolution, failed to have the results its advocates desired, the American belief in the myth of the garden remained obstinately unshaken for many years. This chasm between the ideal and the actual defines the bitterness of the agrarian revolt that made itself felt in the 1870's, particularly through the writings of Hamlin Garland.

The idea of equality in politics was half a century ahead of its embodiment in imaginative literature. From Cooper to Garland, writers about the West struggled against the idea that their characters had no claim upon the attention of the sophisticated reader, except maybe through their lack of refinement. However, by 1890, these characters could be treated as human beings in fiction, perhaps unfortunate ones, but still possessed of dignity. (Summary of Virgin Land ends here.)

As most of the virgin land in the contiguous United States ceased to be virgin by the end of the nineteenth century, Mr. Smith does not explore the significance of the land-motif in twentieth-century American literature. The
usage of this motif has not disappeared from the literature of this century and is clearly evident in the writings of John Steinbeck. For this reason, and because Mr. Steinbeck's works appeal particularly to the author, his works were selected for the purposes of this study. The specific novels chosen for the study were selected because they, more than the remainder of Steinbeck's works, seem to carry the theme of man's relationship to the land.

The primary purpose of this monograph is to determine, through a careful examination of four of Steinbeck's novels, the view held by that author regarding man's relationship to the land and the psychological, social, moral, religious, economic, and political implications of this relationship. A related purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast Steinbeck's ideas regarding the man-land relationship with the ideas concerning that relationship which were so much a part of the American imagination during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The recognized limitation of this monograph lies in the fact that all Steinbeck's works are not included in the study; and therefore, any conclusions based on it may be altered by further investigations.

The monograph is divided into six sections: an introduction; four chapters, each of which deals with the land-motif in a specific novel; and a conclusion. The Introduction includes an explanation of the importance of the land-motif in American history and literature through the nineteenth century, reasons for selecting the particular author and the specific
novels for the study, purposes and limitations of the paper, and the procedure used in developing the monograph.

Chapter I, dealing with the man-land relationship as it appears in *To a God Unknown* (1933), stresses the psychological and religious implications of that relationship, primarily through the character of Joseph Wayne. At this point, Steinbeck does not stress the moral and social implications of this relationship; and he scarcely deals at all with its economic and political implications.

Chapter II, dealing with the land theme in *Of Mice and Men* (1937), emphasizes the psychological, social, moral, and economic implications of the man-land relationship, through the characters George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks, Curley, and Curley's father. Here, the religious and political implications are almost completely absent.

Chapter III contains an examination of the theme as it is presented in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The psychological, social, moral, religious, economic, and political implications of man's relationship to the land are examined through the Joad family, Casy, and the big landowners and businessmen of the 1930's. Chapter III also notes the similarities between Steinbeck's view of man's relationship to the land and the views expressed in the Jeffersonian, transcendental, Whitmanian, and pragmatic philosophies.

Chapter IV, concerning itself with the man-land relationship in *East of Eden* (1952), stresses the psychological, social, and moral implications of this relationship through the characters Samuel Hamilton, Cyrus Trask, Charles Trask, Adam Trask, Aron.
Trask, and Caleb Trask. In this novel, Steinbeck does not emphasize the religious implications of the man-land relationship; and he gives little, if any, attention to the economic and political implications of this relationship.

Based on the previous portions of the monograph, the Conclusion presents a digest of Steinbeck's views regarding man's relationship to the land and the implications of this relationship. The Conclusion also presents the similarities and the differences in Steinbeck's interpretation of this theme and the interpretations of his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American predecessors.
CHAPTER I: MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND IN TO A GOD UNKNOWN.

In To a God Unknown, Steinbeck depicts man's relationship to the land as having stemmed from racial memory. As the history of evolutionary development of mankind is physically repeated in the embryonic stages of human development, may not something similar occur on the psychic level? Steinbeck thought so.¹ In his racial memory, deeply centered within the subconscious, man retains certain instincts which seem to be inexplicable in scientific terms. One of these instincts is a strong attraction to land. Joseph W. Beach observes about To a God Unknown:

"... the main interest of the story lies in the mystical feeling of Joseph Wayne in regard to the land and his relation to it. . . . He has a nature poetic and aloof, regarding himself as a sort of priest, whose paramount concern is to promote the fertility of the earth and of the men and cattle who live upon its surface. . . ."²

Another basic instinct is man's desire to give thanks and praise to the Unknown God who allows him to use the land or who dwells within the land and throughout the rest of the universe.

Man does not know the nature of this God. Neither does he realize that he has these basic instincts, since they


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manifest themselves in his actions rather than in his thoughts.

Steinbeck illustrates the workings of these instincts in *To a God Unknown* through the four Wayne brothers: Joseph, Thomas, Burton, and Benjy. Each of the brothers expresses a different attitude toward the land and toward the Unknown God. Probably each one's attitude toward the God is prompted by his attitude toward the land or vice versa. In Joseph, who has received his father's blessing, these instincts are most prominent. Thomas, who is so like an animal, possesses them, but seems to be completely unaware of their existence, since he blends so well with the natural scheme of things. Burton has possessed the instincts, but he has either lost them, or in him, they have become corrupted by institutionalized religion. Benjy, like Burton, has either lost his basic instincts or has replaced his love for land and religion by his love for sex and drink. Since the basic instincts manifest themselves most purely in the character Joseph, this chapter will be primarily concerned with his attitude toward the land, although occasional mention may be given of his brothers'.

On the first occasion that Joseph is introduced to the reader, his extreme urge for possessing the land becomes quite apparent. He and his father, John, are discussing Joseph's plan to homestead in the West. The old Vermont farmer argues at first that there is no necessity for Joseph's leaving their farm, that the land has always sufficed and will continue to do so. In Joseph's answer to this argument, he betrays the fact that there is more to his wish than just the feeling that the Wayne farm
will not suffice, saying, "'The farm is too small and —' He bent his tall body down toward his father. 'I have a hunger for land of my own, sir..."" 3 This hunger, although not understood by Joseph, becomes increasingly greater as the novel progresses. As he continues to argue the issue with his father, his eyes grow "feverish with the hunger." 4

Finally, his father is persuaded by Joseph's persistence and gives him the blessing which ordinarily would have been bestowed upon his eldest son. The father also promises to join his son in the new western land but in a very unusual way. He explains to Joseph, "'In a year, not more than two, why I'll go with you. I'm an old man, Joseph. I'll go right along with you, over your head, in the air..." 5 This is the first indication that Steinbeck gives us that Joseph's father already belongs to a religious faith which Joseph himself will eventually come to share.

Early in the novel, an identification is made between the land and femininity. Both are sources of life-giving nourishment; and both, as of old, inspire a certain reverence in men for them. When Joseph first arrives in the Nuestra Señora Valley, he sees a land that is womanlike:

There was a curious femaleness about the interlacing boughs and twigs, about the long green cavern cut by the river through the trees and the brilliant underbrush. The endless green halls and aisles and alcoves

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4 Ibid., p. 3.
5 Ibid.
Joseph catches himself slipping into the hypnotic trance that the land is casting and tries to fight against the spell, but he realizes that to fight the spell of the land is to fight against his father, for they are the same thing. At this moment, Joseph intuitively realizes that his father is dead.

As Joseph becomes deeper and deeper enmeshed in the spell cast by the land, the sexual urge possesses him; and he symbolically copulates with the land:

The hunger in his eyes became rapaciousness as he looked down the long green valley. His possessiveness became a passion. "It's mine," he chanted. "Down deep it's mine, right to the centre 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 out, and gripped again. His thighs beat heavily on the earth.

From this point forward, Joseph feels an urgent necessity to protect and care for the land which has symbolically become his wife. Joseph is a man driven by his deep love for the land, a love prompted by, and/or coupled with, his intense sexual drive. He delights in the products of the land because they become products of himself since he has become joined to the land by his symbolic union.

Woodburn Ross points out that:

The word "fetishism" is shocking when applied in a non-Freudian sense to the thinking or feeling of a modern author. But Steinbeck's reactions to some places and things demand the use of the term. He treats them as fetishes, objects possessing unusual — in

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6 Ibid., p. 6.  
7 Ibid., p. 11.
some instances, even magical — powers. . . .

The land is a fetish for Joseph Wayne, as are the products of his and the land's symbolic sexual union. The oak-tree on his claim is the first product of the land to which Joseph attaches a fetishistic significance. When Joseph receives Burton's letter informing him of their father's death, he is standing under this oak. Intuitively, Joseph knows what news the letter contains and has been expecting a confirmation of his earlier feeling that his father has died into the land, and:

...the land seemed to know what it was, too, for a hush had fallen over the grass flats, the meadowlarks had gone away, and even the linnets in the oak-tree had stopped their twittering. . . .

...and the great tree stirred to life under the wind. Joseph raised his head and looked at its old, wrinkled limbs. His eyes lighted with recognition and welcome, for his father's strong and simple being, which had dwelt in his youth like a cloud of peace, had entered the tree.9

Until the termination of the tree's life by his brother Burton, Joseph continues to have a deep reverence for the tree. He consults with the oak at every major crisis, asking the advice and consent of the tree and making offerings to it in order to keep the favor of the Unknown God. Joseph is the undisputed patriarch of the land; and when his brothers join him in the Nuestra Señora Valley, they cluster about his home, which he has established under the protective arms of the oak-tree. Joseph is the nucleus of the

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9Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, op. cit., pp. 23-25.
cell; to him has been given the charge of protecting and caring for the land. In this role, he is the husband of the land and the father of the farm. His passion for fertility and productivity increases as the novel progresses:

Joseph's passion for fertility grew strong. He watched the heavy ceaseless lust of his bulls and the patient, untiring fertility of his cows. He guided the great stallion to the mares. This place was not four homesteads, it was one, and he was the father. When he walked bareheaded through the fields, feeling the wind in his beard, his eyes smouldered with lust. All things about him, the soil, the cattle and the people, were fertile, and Joseph was the source, the root of their fertility; his was the motivating lust. He willed that all things about him must grow, grow quickly, conceive and multiply. The hopeless sin was barrenness, a sin intolerable and unforgivable. . . .

Still Joseph is not aware of thinking these thoughts in his mind, nor does he think them there, rather:

... in his chest and in the corded muscles of his legs. It was the heritage of a race which for a million years had sucked at the breasts of the soil and cohabited with the earth.

The land becomes largely a compensation to Joseph for the loss of his father. True, he has had tendencies before his father's death to feel deeply for the land; however, the actual confirmation of his father's death causes these feelings to intensify. On one occasion, Joseph speaks to his brother Thomas of their father, thus:

"I've always had a curious feeling about Father. He was so completely calm. He wasn't much like other fathers, but he was a kind of a last resort, a thing you could tie to, that would never change. . . ."
"After all," he said lamely, "a man has to have something to tie to, something he can trust to be

10 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
11 Ibid., p. 34.
In the absence of his father, Joseph identifies the land with him and ties to that. All the products of the land take on a new significance and glory for Joseph after he makes this identification. The oak-tree, in particular, Joseph thinks is synonymous with his father.

However, there is another extension of the land to which Joseph attaches a spiritual reverence — the glade which contains a curiously shaped, moss-covered rock from which a stream flows. In this glade are many symbols suggestive of fertility — the bull, the moss-covered rock, and the stream. Joseph first discovers the place when his Indian vaquero, Juanito, takes him and his brother Thomas there. Juanito explains his reason for taking them to the glade, saying, "... when I was so close the Indian in me made me come, señor." Previousiy, Juanito has explained that traditionally Indian women came to this place when they were pregnant. So perhaps "racial memory" forces Juanito to come when he is so close to the glade.

Another corroboration of the mystical power of the glade comes when Elizabeth, Joseph's wife, is attracted to the place during her pregnancy. She has never seen nor heard of the glade, yet she goes there, prompted by a force stronger than herself. Elizabeth is so frightened by the feeling she has in the glade that she prays:

"Lord Jesus protect me from these forbidden things, and

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\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 42.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 45.
keep me in the way of light and tenderness... Guard me against the ancient things in my blood." She remembered how her father said his ancestors a thousand years ago followed the Druidic way.\textsuperscript{14}

Joseph quickly perceives a spiritual essence about the place and explains to his frightened brother Thomas, saying:

"Be still a moment, Tom," he said languidly. "There's something here. You are afraid of it, but I know it. Somewhere, perhaps in an old dream, I have seen this place." He dropped his hands to his sides and whispered, trying the words, "This is holy — and this is old. This is ancient — and holy." The glade was silent. A buzzard swept across the circular sky, low over the tree-tops.\textsuperscript{15}

Joseph feels that this is a place to come in times of great need and places the memory of the glade in reserve. He thinks:

"It would be a place to run to, away from pain or sorrow or disappointment or fear," he thought. "But I have no such need now. I have none of these things to run from. I must remember this place, though. If ever there's need to lose some plaguing thing, that will be the place to go. . . ."\textsuperscript{16}

Eventually, Joseph, finding that his great passion for reproduction can not be satiated by the land alone, decides to marry Elizabeth McGreggor, who has come to the Nuestra Señora Valley as a school teacher. Elizabeth, who has nothing but her facts to protect her, quickly succumbs to the intensely serious request of Joseph Wayne that she be his wife. She senses in him a power beyond herself, and all her facts and logic take flight when she is confronted by his calm, persistent eyes. Naturally, Joseph must obtain the approval of his father, so he

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 151.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 45.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 59.
pleasure and pain is denied me. All things are one, and all a part of me. . . ."19

Benjy's death brings neither sorrow nor gladness to Joseph; so merged is he in the unity of things that he perceives no real difference in good and evil. Things are just what they are.

On the same night, Rama, Thomas's wife, gives Elizabeth a rather lengthy explanation of Joseph's character. Rama tells her:

"In all the world I think there isn't a man less self-conscious, Elizabeth. . . ."

Rama continued: "I do not know whether there are men born outside humanity, or whether some men are so human as to make others seem unreal. Perhaps a godling lives on earth now and then. Joseph has strength beyond vision of shattering, he has the calm of mountains, and his emotion is as wild and fierce and sharp as the lightning and just as reasonless as far as I can see or know. . . ." She cried as though in pain, "I tell you this man is not a man, unless he is all men. The strength, the resistance, the long and stumbling thinking of all men, and all the joy and suffering, too, cancelling each other out, and yet remaining in the contents. He is all these, a repository for a little piece of each man's soul, and more than that, a symbol of the earth's soul."20

Joseph is able to delight in death as well as life. Benjy's death means that there will be graves, another tie to the land. Joseph says to Tom, "'The first grave. Now we're getting somewhere. Houses and children and graves, that's home, Tom. Those are the things to hold a man down. . . .'"21 Again, when Elizabeth dies, Joseph repeats the same idea and requests that the grave be leveled off, that no marker be erected, so that the elements of

19 Ibid., p. 93.
20 Ibid., pp. 97-100.
21 Ibid., p. 102.
Elizabeth's body may more completely merge with, and become indistinct from, the land.

Joseph's deep mystical conviction of the unity of the universe makes him a forgiving priest of the Unknown God. On two occasions, when he has human right to be vindictive, he is not so. The only punishment he allots Juanito for killing his brother Benjy and to Burton for killing his oak-tree, the embodiment of his father, is the punishment that their natures will impose upon them. He speaks to Juanito, thus:

"I have no power to punish. Perhaps you must punish yourself if you find that among your instincts. You will act the course of your breed, as a young bird dog does when it comes to point where the birds are hidden, because that is in its breed. I have no punishment for you."22

Whatever is natural to the species is right. There is really no good or evil. There is just the natural. To be unfaithful to the natural is to do wrong; to be true to the natural is to do right.

Joseph continues to sink deeper into his mystical union with the land and the rest of the universe. He delights in the rain which brings the life-giving liquid to his land, and he progresses to a certainty that his nature and the land's are the same. On one occasion when torrents of rain come beating down upon his land, Joseph feels "... such a love for the land and for Elizabeth that he strode across the room and rested his wet hand on her hair in a kind of benediction."23

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22 Ibid., p. 108.

23 Ibid., p. 120.
This is obviously symbolic of Elizabeth's baptism into the new faith, for she feels a sensation similar to the one at confirmation:

"When I was confirmed, the bishop laid his hand on my head as you are doing, and his hand was cold. It ran shivers down my neck. I thought it was the Holy Spirit." \(^{24}\)

But this is not the holy spirit in any orthodox sense of the word, for Joseph is the priest of a religion that is as old as man, perhaps even as old as the earth, the universe. His religion stems from the instinct, embedded in his 'racial memory,' to sacrifice to an Unknown God of the universe. Joseph does not know why he smears pig's blood upon the trunk of his oak-tree or why he pours a cup of wine upon its base, but he does these things prompted by processes that lie obscured in blacker pools of knowledge than the rational or conscious thought processes can fathom.

When Father Angelo sees Joseph, at the fiesta, pouring wine upon the oak-tree, he is displeased with the action, although he says:

"... I understand this thing you do," Father Angelo continued gently. "It is this way: The Devil has owned this country for many thousands of years, Christ for a very few. And as in a newly conquered nation, the old customs are practised a long time, ... so here, my son, some of the old habits persist, even under the dominion of Christ." \(^{25}\)

The remnants of pagan influences are still strong even within the institutionalized church. Father Angelo, himself, is guilty of practicing some of them. After the mass is over, when

\(^{24}\)Ibid., pp. 120-121.

\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 130.
he is folding the images of Mary and the Christ, he "... did it well, genuflecting before each one before he took it down and unscrewed its head."\(^{26}\) The tendency to worship objects has not died out even in organized churches. This instinct is within Father Angelo enough so as to make him capable of understanding Joseph's actions.

However, Burton does not understand, or is afraid to try to understand, this paganistic instinct. He tells Elizabeth, "... my brother is denying Christ. He is worshipping as the old pagans did. He is losing his soul and letting in the evil."\(^{27}\) Joseph denies this charge, saying, "I'm denying no Christ, ... I'm doing a simple thing that pleases me."\(^{28}\) Joseph, although he wonders himself at times whether he is guilty of what Burton accuses him, is not denying Christ. The pagan instinct which prompts him to reverence the land and the products of the land also prompts the reverence which Christians give to Christ. As a matter of fact, this religious instinct, embedded in racial memory, inspires all religious activity. In To a God Unknown, Steinbeck's attitude toward religious institutions, expressed much more succinctly in The Grapes of Wrath, is beginning to take form.

If Joseph had resisted the pull toward the western land, if he had remained in the East, as Burton tells him:

"... the thing might have died — but you came here."

\(^{26}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 129.\)
\(^{27}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 167.\)
\(^{28}\text{Ibid.}\)
His hands swept out to indicate the country. "The mountains are too high," he cried. "The place is too savage. And all the people carry the seed of this evil thing in them." 29

In the East, people have grown far enough away from their natural instincts; they have buried them in formalized institutions, but here the land draws a person back to the elements, back to the beginnings, the ancient. Probably Burton feels the pull, for he certainly recognizes that the land seems to cast a type of spell, that the land is responsible for Joseph's growing paganism. Although Burton girdles the oak-tree, causing its death, he does not have complete confidence that he is doing the right thing, for he finds assuring Joseph that he (Burton) has acted correctly is necessary: "What I have done seems right to me, Joseph. Remember that. I want you to remember that." 30 Burton leaves the land and kills the sacred tree, but fear seems to drive him from the valley, fear that he might revert to the pagan tendencies he observes in Joseph, fear that he might succumb to the enticement of the wild, savage land which calls one back to what is ancient in his blood, ancient in his racial memory.

The land is not all good, even Joseph feels that there is an evil principle hovering over, and abiding within, the land. Even within the glade, where the rock whose stream flows, seemingly, from the center of the world, the heart of the universe, there is an evil principle which coexists with the life-giving

29 Ibid., p. 169.
30 Ibid., p. 172.
principle. The term "evil" is used here cautiously, for the presence which coexists with the life-giving principle may ultimately prove to be good to the degree that its contribution is just as necessary to the unified cycle as is the contribution of the life-giving principle. "Evil" is used here because various characters who perceive this presence on different occasions in the novel label it so.

On the first occasion that Joseph, Thomas, and Juanito visit the glade, Thomas reacts as any animal would naturally react to the presence of death — with fright:

"I never saw this place before. I don't think I like it, I can't tell." His voice was babbling. He held the coon tightly under his arm while it struggled and bit and tried to escape.31

Joseph feels the holiness of the place (in a passage quoted earlier) in spite of the buzzard, the symbol of death, which passes over it.

Again when Joseph goes to meet Juanito in the glade, after Juanito has killed Benjy, he perceives the "evil" presence of the place:

The rustling increased. The whole round space became surcharged with life, saturated with furtive movement. Joseph's hair bristled on his head. "There's evil here to-night," he thought. "I know now what the horse feared. . . ."32

When Elizabeth is attracted there, during her pregnancy, she, also, feels the "evil." The rock, which at first seems to her the most loveable and dearest thing in the world,

31 Ibid., p. 44.
32 Ibid., p. 106.
suddenly takes on an ugly appearance:

"And then the feeling of the place changed. Something evil came into it." Her voice grew husky with the memory. "Something malicious was in the glade, something that wanted to destroy me..." 33

On the occasion when Elizabeth falls on the rock and dies in her attempt to tame it and convince herself that its significance is not really what she felt it was during her pregnancy, there is again a cold presence about the place: "Joseph shivered and turned away. 'Let's start for home, dear. The cold's coming.' He strolled toward the path." 34

Not only is the "evil" side of the rock in the glade pointed out on various occasions, but throughout nature everything seems to display this "evil" side. Several scenes are described in which predatory animals act out their natures by feeding upon other species and sometimes upon their own.

At times, the land itself seems to be possessed by an "evil" presence. The drought is a part of a recurring cycle; and when it comes upon the land, the land seems to go mad — to become vindictive in its sickness and death. Joseph wonders:

"... why the land seems vindictive, now it is dead." He thought of the hills, like blind snakes with frayed and peeled skins, lying in it about this stronghold where the water still flowed... 35

The land, like an animal who is preyed upon, is the victim of a force stronger than itself — the force of the Unknown God is exhibited not only in the land, but throughout nature. Joseph

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33 Ibid., pp. 183-184.
34 Ibid., p. 191.
35 Ibid., p. 236.
explains to Rama about the land, "'The land is struck,' he went on. 'The land is not dead, but it is sinking under a force too strong for it. And I am staying to protect the land.'"36

Each person or group tries to bring the rain to save the land in his own way. Stanley Hyman points out:

The strong emphasis on the rejection of solutions in this period comes through most clearly in To a God Unknown, where Steinbeck gives each of them a chance to bring rain in a drought: the folk try weather signs, the priest prays, the bartender offers to put out a free barrel of whiskey, and Joseph manipulates his mystic pagan symbols. All fail, and finally only Joseph's sacrificial suicide brings the rain.37

In man's helplessness to change the nature of the Unknown God, he endeavors to appease Him, in order to save himself and the land from His wrath. If forces overtake him, and if he fails to save the land, a sense of blame falls upon his shoulders. Helpless as he is, Joseph Wayne seeks by various methods to save his land — his methods take the form of sacrifices to the Unknown God. Joseph offers at least three sacrifices to the Unknown God after the drought falls upon his land — his child (given to Rama), a pig (in imitation of the sacrifice given by the old man who lived by the sea), and finally himself.

With each of these sacrifices, Joseph grows closer and closer to the land, until at last he merges with it completely, realizing that he is the land, the rain, the rock, the universe. The spirit which has seemed to be evil is actually what finally

36 Ibid., p. 229.
makes possible man's final and complete union with the universe. Woodburn Ross points out:

Steinbeck never explains the nature of the unity of the cosmos which he perceives... indeed, he is never able rationally to prove that the unity about which he speaks exists at all. But the fact that his notions about the unity of things are very incomplete and rest upon feeling, insight, intuition, rather than upon reason is neither here nor there. The fact is that as an artist he believes in these things. They represent a part of Steinbeck which is not controlled by scientific rationalism.38

So as the lifeblood flows from Joseph's veins, he becomes ecstactically aware that:

"I am the rain." And yet he looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss. He felt the driving rain, and heard it whipping down, pattering on the ground. He saw his hills grow dark with moisture. Then a lancing pain shot through the heart of the world. "I am the land," he said, "and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while."39

Joseph's sacrifice is not just the Christian sacrifice. In part, his sacrifice is that of the Fisher King; but Steinbeck had in mind more the antecedents of the Fisher King than the Fisher King himself. Rather, Joseph is more a Frazerian divine king who has to die because of his loss of divine potency.40

Joseph makes every effort to retain his potency while his land is sinking under the drought. He feels strongly his

39 Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, op. cit., pp. 264-265.
failure to keep the land fertile; and as the land loses its fertility, Joseph's potency seems to ebb also. Rama, who realizes Joseph's great need to keep his potency, visits his bed on the night following Elizabeth's death. After they complete their sexual union, she says:

"It was a need to you," she whispered. "It was a hunger in me, but a need to you. The long deep river of sorrow is diverted and sucked into me, and the sorrow which is only a warm wan pleasure is drawn out in a moment. . . ." 41

Unfortunately, this union fails to save the potency of the king; and the land continues to scorch to a crisp under the intensely merciless sun; and the parsimonious Unknown God reserves His rain.

Joseph makes his sacrifices, finally offering himself.

Warren French observes that Steinbeck:

. . . . probably means to imply that Joseph makes his sacrifice not because it has some magical efficacy, but because, like the old man, he likes to do it. Since Joseph is the central character, the point of allegory seems to be that man's highest good is found not in survival, but in being true to his own secret nature. . . . 42

Joseph's nature is to make sacrifices to the Unknown God. Doing this makes him feel good and right. For Thomas, Burton, Benjy, Father Angelo, or any of the others, to do the same thing would be wrong and unnatural. Each of them has his own way of relating to the Unknown God, and no two ways are exactly alike.

Joseph's intense love of the land makes him its willing savior. Symbolically, he becomes the type of Western man; and

41 Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, op. cit., p. 201.

his death becomes the sacrifice of a man for his country. He
dies unselfishly to save the land.43

To a God Unknown is set off from the conventional
naturalistic novel by the strong vein of mysticism that runs
through it. In this novel, Steinbeck seems to say that life
is more mysterious, more wonderful than even biologists have
suspected. His insistence upon the unity of all life leads
him invariably to a religious attitude.44 This religious
attitude is inspired to a great degree by Steinbeck's deep
feeling for the land and his view of man's relationship to it.

Harry T. Moore points out:

In Steinbeck's world, men who have loved the soil and
worked in it have two great enemies: The first is drought,
the second is the market and labor conditions imposed upon
them by the social systems. To a God Unknown depicts, as
we have seen, the ravages of drought; in his succeeding
books Steinbeck was to turn his attention to the social
system. In The Grapes of Wrath he combines these two
factors.45

Steinbeck gives little attention to the social, economic, moral,
and political implications of man's relationship to the land in
To a God Unknown. Rather he emphasizes the religious and psycho-
logical implications of this relationship. Since the events of
the novel seem dream-like in quality, Steinbeck naturally deals
best with these more abstract attitudes which arise from man's
relationship to the land.

43Carpenter, op. cit., p. 73.

44Frederick Bracher, "Steinbeck and the Biological View
of Man," in Steinbeck and His Critics, ed. by E. W. Tedlock and
C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957),
p. 185.

45Harry T. Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck (Chicago:
Normandie House, 1939), p. 32.
CHAPTER II: MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND IN OF MICE AND MEN

Man's relationship to the land in Of Mice and Men, as is true in To a God Unknown, seems to be instinctual and inspired by racial memory; however, this novel deals less with the religious implications of this instinct than does its predecessor. Here, Steinbeck turns his attention to the effects of owning too much land and of owning none at all on an individual's personality and his social interaction with the group. This chapter examines both situations; the first, through the characters of Curley and his father; and the second, through the characters of Candy, Crooks, Lennie, and George.

Steinbeck's outcry against the system which permits so few to own so much property, heard but faintly in Of Mice and Men, foreshadows the view that he unmistakably and vociferously presented two years later in The Grapes of Wrath. Both a naturalist and an altruist, Steinbeck felt there was something inherently sick and evil about systems that denied most men the right to obtain a piece of land. Land is required by man's nature for spiritual survival, as much as food and water is for biological survival. Men who overindulge their appetites are punished in various ways, and they who eat or drink too much suffer almost as much as they who have not eaten or drunk at all. The same happens to men who overindulge their appetite for land. Instead of glorifying themselves and the land by working their
own claim, they do less and less of the work; and a breach grows between them and the land. Land is like a woman in its demand for love; and if love is denied, the soil dies; but the man who is responsible for the neglect also suffers a decay and a spiritual and moral degeneration. One man's possessing too many women is unnatural; so is one man's possessing land that he cannot give his personal attention.

Men who allow this to happen to themselves or who are the victims of systems that allow this to happen become unnatural men. They compensate for their moral and spiritual decay by pushing other people around. When Lennie and George arrive late for work on the ranch, Candy informs them, "'The boss was expectin' you last night... He was sore as hell when you wasn't here to go out this morning...""¹ Mostly the workers "catch hell;" but if there is a person of a different race nearby, then the boss really has a scapegoat; and he seldom fails to use every opportunity of relieving his own frustrations by making that scapegoat suffer. Candy also tells Lennie and George, "'Ya see the stable buck's a nigger... The boss gives him hell when he's mad. But the stable buck don't give a damn about that...""² However, the stable buck does "give a damn about that," as is apparent later; but he has so reduced his ego that he absorbs all insults without reflecting emotion, especially to his employer and his employer's family.

Although the owner of the ranch misuses his authority in

² Ibid., p. 22.
dealing with his workers, his son Curley illustrates even better how callous a man becomes when he knows not the land at all. Curley, the son of a landowner, has never known the necessity or the joy of tilling a small piece of land of his own. Perhaps at one time, his father knew the struggle involved in acquiring land and building up a large ranch; but Curley has always enjoyed the products of others' labors. He has become so morally and spiritually warped that he stoops to harassing Lennie. On one occasion when Lennie, instructed by George to be silent, fails to reply to Curley's question, Curley exclaims, "'By Christ, he's gotta talk when he's spoke to. . . .'"³ And to George, when George answers for Lennie, "'What the hell are you gettin' into it for?'"⁴ Curley can not bear for anyone to interfere with his plans for inflicting works and words of violence. He is a little man by stature, and he is even smaller morally and spiritually. Curley is, as Candy describes him:

"... like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy. . . ."⁵

The fact that the two men in particular with whom Curley tries to start trouble are Lennie, who is big physically, and Slim, who is big spiritually, morally, and intellectually, may be of some significance. Both Curley and his father find wearing high-heeled boots necessary to distinguish them as "boss" men. The distinction

³Ibid., p. 28.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., p. 29.
between them and laboring men does not exist on physical,
moral, spiritual, or intellectual planes but must be created
artificially by high-heeled boots and unnatural systems.

Peter Lisca points out that the grove by the river,
where we meet and part with George and Lennie, is used as a
symbol of retreat to a world of primeval innocence. The char­
acters can not possibly remain in such a place; therefore,
Steinbeck translates this primeval innocence in terms of possi­bility in the real world — first, as "a little house an' a couple of acres" and second, as the rabbits. For most of the
characters in Of Mice and Men, land or the dream of landowner­ship offers a possible way of retaining, at least in part, one's primeval innocence in the reality of this world.

Early in the novel, Steinbeck pictures the grove by the river, thus:

on the valley side the water is lined with trees — willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter's flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool.

There is a quality highly suggestive of femininity about this landscape to which Steinbeck attaches an almost fetishistic power. Here is a place to which many creatures, man and beast, have come often in the past, probably to refresh or revive their primeval innocence:

There is a path through the willows and among the

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7 Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, op. cit., p. 1.
sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool, and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water. In front of the low horizontal limb of a giant sycamore there is an ash pile made by many fires; the limb is worn smooth by men who have sat on it.

Man turns to such a place in times of trouble, as a child turns to its mother. To this grove, even Lennie does not forget to return; however, for humanity, permanent residence in such a place is an impossibility within the framework of our society. This means that man's instinctive desire for primeval innocence must be expressed in some other terms, and a rather large part of that expression in Of Mice and Men comes through man's dream of owning land. As he is incapable of fulfilling this dream, he is incapable of realizing his full potential as a man.

Steinbeck presents the non-landowning, laboring man's relationship to the land through the characters of Lennie, George, Candy, and Crooks. As do most of the other workers, they exist in a world of hard reality and are susceptible to dreams. They have an intense yearning for landownership, but they are forced to travel from one place to another in search of work. They can not stay in one place long enough to marry, raise a family, and till their own soil; but they must be constantly moving with job opportunities. They meet few people with whom they contract a lasting friendship, and a sense of belonging anywhere is denied them. Consequently, they are very lonely

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8 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

and despairing individuals. George gives a good description of the typical ranch laborer, in the first few pages of the novel, when he tells Lennie:

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

Because they are forced to live this type of sordid existence, they develop feelings of fear and insecurity out of which grow skepticism and distrust of others and their motives. Forever they must fear being "canned" by their employer, if they do the slightest thing to provoke him. They may even be "canned" if they do nothing — merely at the whim of the rancher's son or his son's wife. When Candy informs George and Lennie that Curley enjoys harassing larger men, he also entreats them, "Don't tell Curley I said none of this. He'd slough me. He just don't give a damn. Won't ever get canned 'cause his old man's the boss." Later in the novel, when he thinks that his own problem has been solved, Candy tells George and Lennie what happens to the old and disabled workhands after they can do no more work:

"They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the county. . . . You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wish somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have

10 Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, op. cit., p. 15.
11 Ibid., p. 30.
Fear can easily be detected in Crooks' reaction to Curley's wife's threats of having him ousted. Crooks, having been rejected and threatened by everyone, both owners and workers, for so long, has no personality, no ego. He has come to utter merely a "Yes, ma'am" in reply to insult and challenge. He is easily brought back to reality by his superiors, and his dreams are brief.

Accompanying fear is distrust. The workers do not only distrust their employer but each other also. As Slim says, "'Ain't many guys travel around together, . . . I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'" Almost everyone in the novel expresses this same reaction to George and Lennie's relationship. In the laboring man's world, contracting lasting friendships is rare indeed.

Crooks illustrates his distrust of people in his hesitancy to let Lennie into his quarters at the barn. He insists, "'This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me. . . . I ain't wanted in the bunk house, and you ain't wanted in my room.'" Actually Crooks, though he grudgingly lets Lennie in, can not conceal his pleasure in the company offered by him and, eventually, Candy. But Crooks has built such a barrier between himself and the world and has obviously been

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12 Ibid., p. 66.
13 Ibid., p. 38.
14 Ibid., p. 75.
beaten down by the world so many times that he has difficulty in believing anything; so when Candy confirms Lennie's story about their intentions to buy a piece of land, Crooks finds believing in the dream almost impossible. He says:

"I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles [sic] on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Everybody wants a little piece of land. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody ever gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkin' about it, but it's just in their head."^{15}

Since belief is so difficult for Crooks, he has been denied the one consolation of the lonely, homeless workman — the ability to dream. Dreaming is so difficult for him that his dreams are easily shattered. This difference between Crooks and the other workers can probably be attributed to his racial difference. He is made to feel doubly subordinate; however, Crooks finds refusing Lennie's proffered companionship impossible, for Lennie can not and does not make distinctions regarding race. Crooks has to explain to Lennie that he is barred from their bunk house because of his race.

This social ostracism, added to his lack of land, has not only made Crooks a more skeptical man but a lonelier one also. Although he appears proud and aloof and demands others to keep their distance because of his fear of rejection, he confesses to Lennie his intense loneliness:

"S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't

\[^{15}\text{Ibid., p. 81.}\]
Lennie is probably the only person on the ranch to whom Crooks could or would admit his loneliness, and he does so to him because Lennie lacks the intelligence to understand.

That the land-dream of George and Lennie has become a ritual in which George does not really believe is apparent in the beginning of the novel. Although Lennie is not capable of either belief or disbelief on very high levels, George's narration of their dream provides him security and soothes his fear. The story is performed often when Lennie is feeling insecure. For Lennie, the narration of the land-dream provides a substitute for the grove by the river. By showing the effect of the land-dream on even one such as Lennie, Steinbeck indicates his belief that man's need and yearning for land is not controlled by his level of intelligence and may, therefore, be instinctual.

One becomes aware when George first narrates the dream to Lennie that he has no particular place in mind; no details are given; but midpoint in the novel, when George again tells the story, the reader can perceive that he is thinking of a specific place. Details are given; the land is in the amount of ten acres and the owners must sell cheaply. Still George does not believe that owning land will ever become a reality.

\[16\text{Ibid., p. 80.}\]
\[17\text{Lisca, op. cit., p. 137.}\]
for him until Candy offers to help purchase the land with him and Lennie. Believing in the reality of making their dream come true is just as difficult for Lennie and Candy. Steinbeck describes them, thus: "They looked at one another, amazed. This thing they had never really believed in was coming true." 18 Probably, George never fully believes in the achievement of the dream; for at the end of the novel, when Candy tries to persuade him to promise that they (Candy and George) will still fulfill the dream, he says, "'I think I knewed from the very first. I think I knewed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would.'" 19 George has been whipped back into the world of reality after Lennie's death. Through Lennie, and Lennie alone, does the dream of landownership have any significance for George. 20 As George once told Slim:

"... I ain't so bright neither, or I wouldn't be buckin' barley for my fifty and found. If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I'd have my own little place, an' I'd be bringin' in my own crops, 'stead of doin' all the work and not getting what comes up outa the ground..." 21

Without Lennie, George would be just like all the other workers on the ranch — just as lonely, just as skeptical, just as fearful; but taking care of Lennie is, in part, almost like owning a piece of soil. Lennie is so

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18 Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, op. cit., p. 66.
19 Ibid., p. 103.
20 Lisca, op. cit., p. 142.
21 Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, op. cit., p. 43.
close to the soil and to natural things, and Lennie responds to George's directing hands almost as the soil would. Sharing their dream of land makes the dream special and them special. Most of the laborers have the dream in their hearts and minds; but because they do not share the dream with someone else, it does not come as close to reality as Lennie and George's dream.

When George explains to Slim why he and Lennie travel together, he pretends that Lennie is a nuisance most of the time (which he probably is); but that he (George) has grown accustomed to traveling with him. George also admits to Slim:

"I ain't got no people, . . . I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time." 22

Although Lennie gives to George a sense of power and their shared dream gives direction to their lives and makes them different from the others, George has to triumph over himself in the end and destroy Lennie. He accepts his own mediocrity and consciously rejects his dream of greatness. 23 Actually George does not have much choice — either he has to destroy Lennie or let society and harsh reality destroy him. Probably, he remembers Candy's statement regarding the killing of his dog: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog. . . ." 24

As Lennie dies, their dream of land does also; and George, like

22 Ibid., p. 45.
24 Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men, op. cit., p. 67.
all the other ranch hands, will work his month, take his fifty dollars, spend the night in "some lousy cat house," or sit in some poolroom until everybody goes home. No more will he dream of the little place where:

"... when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof ..." 25

or of the little piece of land that "... ain't enough land so we'd have to work too hard. ..." 26 No more will he dream of a place where:

"We'd jus' live there. We'd belong there. There wouldn't be no more runnin' round the country and gettin' fed by a Jap cook. No, sir, we'd have our own place where we belonged and not sleep in no bunk house. ..." 27

or of the place where:

"... 'nobody could can us. If we don't like a guy we can say, 'Get the hell out,' and by God he's got to do it. An' if a fren' come along, why we'd have an extra bunk, an' we'd say, 'Why don't you spen' the night?' An' by God he would. ..." 28

Even the dream, which existed for George only through Lennie, is destroyed. There are those who go on dreaming, but George is not one of them; neither is George a "doer." He may be a potential "doer;" but if so, he will require many more lessons from the school of "hard knocks" before becoming a "Tom Joad."

Of Mice and Men is almost completely free of the

25 Ibid., p. 16.
26 Ibid., p. 63.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 64.
religious and political implications of man's relationship to the land. Here Steinbeck's concern is particularly with the social, psychological, and moral implications of the man-land relationship. The economic implications, though present, lie somewhat dormant in this novel, not becoming full-blown until *The Grapes of Wrath*. 
CHAPTER III: MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND IN THE GRAPES OF WRATH

In Of Mice and Men, the relation of man to land is mystical, symbolic, and mythical; whereas, in The Grapes of Wrath, man's identity with the growth cycle is pragmatic and socially practical.¹ Steinbeck's budding ideas concerning man's relationship to the land in the former novel became full-blown in the latter one. As in Of Mice and Men and To a God Unknown, in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck takes the position that man's attraction to land may be instinctually and biologically prompted. Here, though, he goes further and examines the consequences to systems which do not provide for fulfilling this innate need of man.

This chapter, as did the previous one, deals with two aspects of man's relationship to land: first, the effects of his owning too much; and second, the effects of his owning none at all. However, as Steinbeck's view of man's relationship to land is obviously inspired by certain ideas of the Jeffersonian,² transcendental, Whitmanian, and pragmatic³ philosophies, consideration is also given to their roles in Steinbeck's.


²Ibid. [Lisca summarizes Chester Eisenger's views.]

Steinbeck felt that abstract lust for possession of land isolates a man from his fellowmen and destroys his unity with nature. This is what somehow had happened in the American system of landownership in the 1930's, not only in California but also in Oklahoma and the other states in the Midwest. Landholdings had become larger and larger; and the owners, fewer and fewer. In the Midwest, because of both natural and economic conditions (the great drought and the great depression), the land had come to be mortgaged to the banks and the land companies; and consequently, those who formerly loved and owned the land were forced to become their tenants. Eventually, when the land had died from ill use and lack of love, the big landowners decided to use the tenants no longer but to drive them off and plant the land in cotton. They had no regard either for the tenants or the land.

Meanwhile, in California, landholdings continued to grow larger. Laborers, such as the Joads, were encouraged to come to California by handbills which described the vast demand for labor and the terrific wages; but when they arrived, they discovered that thousands had been enticed to come there by the same means. Now, an oversupply of laborers existed in California; naturally the businessmen capitalized on this situation by making conditions unbearable for the workers and then offering them wages upon which they could not subsist.

Steinbeck did not object to the private enterprise

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system but to the irresponsibility of successful businessmen for practicing such inhumane dealings with their fellowmen—dealings which, if they were not corrected, he feared would lead to revolution and destruction of our culture. In California, not only was the laborer dealt with sordidly by the landlords; but also the possibility of a small landholding existing anymore became virtually nil. Those who owned the land owned also the canneries and the banks. They controlled the state, city, and local organizations; they controlled the systems and the non-landowners. Police did their bidding and so did most of the people.

Corporations came to own and control the land, and corporations were too remote and impersonal to love and care for the land adequately. And throughout the country, more and more control of the land went to corporations. The system was like a giant monster with an insatiable appetite—an abstract lust for profit that could be gained from the produce of the land and the debasing and demoralizing of the poor laboring workers—a monster that absorbed the common man and his land. These landowners were not interested in the produce of the land to feed themselves or their families or their fellowmen. They were interested only in monetary gain, regardless of the expense of human life and dignity. They could not possibly care less about the land. Many had never even seen the land they owned.

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6 Ibid., p. 110.
Early in the novel, Steinbeck pictures this breach between the owners and the land in his description of the man driving the tractor over someone else's land, thus:

... he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat. ... The driver could not control it. ... because the monster that built the tractors, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him. ... He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. ... He could not cheer or beat or curse or encourage the extension of his power, and because of this he could not cheer or whip or curse or encourage himself. He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped did not germinate, it was nothing. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or drowned in a flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than to the tractor.

The man pictured driving the tractor did not own the land. If these were his tractor and his land, maybe he could feel again the pangs of love and patience and suffering that comes with raising a crop from one's own soil. This illustrates what the landowners had done, not only to themselves but to the common man. The common man did not know whom to blame or who was responsible. Ownership had become so abstract; and the dispossessed found it difficult to relieve their frustrations with, and grievances against, banks and land companies.

Human erosion is as much the result of separation from the land, Steinbeck argues, as of poverty. For not only were the poor, dispossessed migrants suffering from economic and spiritual erosion; but the landowners were suffering from moral

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erosion, as the result of owning too much land. Steinbeck portrays this erosion through his description of the representatives of organizations — businessmen. He writes of them, thus:

... little pot-bellied men in light suits and panama hats; clean, pink men with puzzled, worried eyes, with restless eyes. Worried because formulas do not work out; hungry for security and yet sensing its disappearance from the earth. In their lapels the insignia of lodges and service clubs, places where they can go and, by a weight of numbers of little worried men, reassure themselves that business is noble and not the curious ritualized thievery they know it is; that businessmen are intelligent in spite of the records of their stupidity; that they are kind and charitable in spite of the principles of sound business; that their lives are rich instead of the thin tiresome routines they know; and that a time is coming when they will not be afraid any more.

Steinbeck was able to sympathize with all the individuals who were caught in the wheels of the terrible, grinding monster, the machine, the system that had somehow gone awry and gotten control of men, all men, even those who represented the system and profited materially. Steinbeck did not advocate the "have-nots" replacing the "haves," but merely that the "haves" reform and expand their systems so that the moral dignity of both groups might be preserved. Both groups suffer from the land separation.

The tenant farmer correctly appraises the situation in the following statement:

"... let a man get property he doesn't see, or can't

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8Lisca, op. cit., p. 154.
take time to get his fingers in, or can't be there
to walk on it — why, then the property is the man.
He can't do what he wants, he can't think what he
wants. The property is the man, stronger than he
is. And he is small, not big. Only his possessions
are big — and he's the servant of his property..."11

Fontenrose points out a parallel between the large
tracts of uncultivated land that landless farmers could work,
and the prophecies that the absentee owners, grown soft, will
lose those lands to the dispossessed, strong in adversity and
in union, and the parable of the vineyard: the wicked husband­
men will be destroyed and the vineyard let to other husband­
men who will produce as they should (Matthew 21:33-41).12 This
had happened when the early Americans came to California and
took the land from the Mexicans. Now, the homeless migrants
looked upon the fallow fields "... , and knew the lust to
take these fields and make them grow strength for his children
and a little comfort for his wife. ..."13

Steinbeck's foreboding that the dispossessed would
seize the land and oust the present owners is prompted by
biological considerations.14 There is something within man's
very nature that requires land and the working of land as much
as his body requires food and water. This longing is a part
of his instinct for survival; and when this instinct is repressed

12Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction
and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963),
p. 80.
14French, op. cit., pp. 97-98.
and man is denied this "food," his entire system reacts to this denial; and all his forces are mobilized to combat this offense. He will not long be oppressed.

Steinbeck firmly believed that humanity was the product of natural forces and that the profoundest biological urge is the urge for life and for survival and reproduction; therefore, he considered virtue to be whatever furthers these ends. These beliefs influenced him to write with sympathy, tenderness, and love of those he thought to be living such lives. Although these natural men sometimes speak offensively, at least to the ears of the puritan listeners, Steinbeck refused to prettify them to please his critics or his readers. He understood the Joad family and their religion which was a queer mixture of half-digested Christianity and profaneness of utterance and elemental farmyard knowledge. Their lives were very close to the most elemental manifestations of nature, of sex and death. Through his portrayal of these people, Steinbeck illustrated quite clearly his views of the man-land relationship and its implications. Whereas the characters in *Of Mice and Men* possessed more individuality, the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath* functions primarily as a "personalized" group.

As has been pointed out, Steinbeck approaches being

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a Jeffersonian in his belief in the common man and in his feeling that an agrarian way of life makes us realize the full potentialities of the democratic creed. As one of the tenant farmers says:

"Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. That is so."\(^1\)

In Steinbeck's view, land naturally belongs to those who want, need, love, and attend the soil. In telling the history of land possession in California, he illustrates through historical events how the hungry Americans were able to seize the land from the Mexicans because the Mexicans wanted nothing in the world so desperately as the Americans wanted land. By the 1930's, the descendants of these early Americans had lost that fervor and that love. Then the Okies had that same hunger and fierceness. The implications are that, if the existing systems were not overhauled so that this hunger might be satisfied, these systems would be overthrown. Steinbeck describes the Okies, thus:

They were hungry, and they were fierce. And they had hoped to find a home, and they found only hatred. . . .

\[\text{the new barbarians wanted only two things — land and food; and to them the two were one.} \]

Steinbeck, like Jefferson, also felt that a loss of land leads

\(^1\)Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, op. cit., p. 31.

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 207-208.
to a loss of dignity. "Dignity," as used by Steinbeck, means "a register of man's responsibility to the community." A loss of dignity reduces man's responsibility and makes him a sullen outcast who will strike the government in anyway he can think. 20 The loss of land and dignity can not be compensated for by giving the dispossessed shelter or even feeding them. The trouble with the Weedpatch Camp was in providing the Joads with everything but work. Their dream was to work their own land. 21

Steinbeck notes two natural laws that govern ownership of land:

. . . . when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. . . . . when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. . . . repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. . . . 22

Thus are produced the rebels of society. From these roots spring revolutions. For the dispossessed tenant farmers of the Midwest, whose story Steinbeck both lived and wrote, change was effected by the movement, the highways, the camps along the roads, the fear of hunger, and the hostility with which they were received in the "land of milk and honey."

Although Steinbeck spelled out no clear-cut solution to the problem in the novel, he did make some proposals in the San Francisco News which indicate that he considered land as a medicine for the sickness that had descended upon the Joads

20 Lisca, op. cit., p. 154.
21 French, op. cit., p. 100.
and their brothers. Essentially, he proposed these three reforms:

1. That migrant laborers be allotted small "subsistence" farms when no call for migrant labor existed.

2. That a Migratory Labor Board be created to help allot labor where needed and set fair wage rates.

3. That vigilante-ism and terrorism be punished.23

Steinbeck's proposals were never instituted, for with the advent of World War II, the migrants' problems were solved, temporarily anyway.

Steinbeck, like most transcendentalists, assumed that man in his natural state, uncorrupted by civilized institutions, tends to do the right thing, that if people develop the proper attitudes they will be able to govern themselves. He, as a novelist, tried to help them see themselves as they are.24

The Grapes of Wrath tells the story of a family's growth into the recognition of a basic transcendental concept—the idea of cosmic unity. Casy is their teacher or their preacher; he, like Emerson himself, has rejected his congregation and gone out to preach to the world. Although Casy keeps insisting that he does not preach anymore, he continues to preach and teach the new ideas that are just becoming apparent to him. Certainly his ideas could not always be expressed in an organized, orthodox church; and this gives him shame from time to time, until he learns his final lesson in prison: that crime is prompted by need. Before Casy meets with the Joads and joins them on their

23 Lisca, op. cit., p. 152.
trek to California, he has been in the wilderness, attempting to organize his thoughts and beliefs; and he emerges with the basic doctrine of Christianity — love of all mankind. This belief is also basic to the transcendental philosophy. Casy emerges from the wilderness as a child from the womb — reborn. He has grown to feel that there are things that people do, some are nice and others are not so nice; but beyond that, no one has the right to judge.

Early in the trek to California, Casy's words and deeds indicate that he has undergone a mystical or religious experience and that he has greater insight and understanding of what will happen to the Joads and others like them when they get to California and even after. Upon several occasions, he expresses the idea of movement and change in the universe. Once, upon hearing someone complain of the world situation, Casy remarks:

"... I been walkin' aroun' in the country. Ever'body's askin' that. What we comin' to? Seems to me we don't never come to nothin'. Always on the way. Always goin' and goin'. Why don't folks think about that? They's movement now. People moving. We know why, an' we know how. Movin' 'cause they got to. That's why folks always move. Movin' 'cause they want somepin' better'n what they got. An' that's the only way they'll ever git it. Wantin' it and needin' it, they'll go out an' git it. It's bein' hurt that makes folks mad to fightin'. . . ."26

Casy sees a mystic vision of the ever-changing, ever-moving patterns in the universe; and he sees them as eventually effecting good. The built-in responses of men and everything in the universe function toward recognition of a cosmic unity and ultimate goodness.


Casy sees events occurring that will change the entire country. People, in general, are not aware of this movement and its implications. The Joads are not. Ma and Tom keep saying that they are going to live the moment and not think any further ahead, and most of the others are like them.

Casy is the first to recognize that the life force that drives the turtle (mentioned early in the novel) drives the Joads, also. There is a force within the universe which pushes things toward survival and eventual recognition of cosmic unity.

Ma is very slow to learn this lesson, for achieving cosmic unity requires a disintegration of family ties. This is happening in spite of Ma, as is evidenced within the Joad family alone. Ma can not understand that the disintegration of family ties is necessary to the survival of the species, but she does understand that:

"... We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on — changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on."

"Ever'thing we do — seems to me is aimed right at goin' on. Seems that way to me. Even gettin' hungry — even bein' sick; some die, but the rest is tougher. Jus' try to live the day, jus' the day."

Though slow to understand cosmic unity, Ma has her function in achieving its plan. Ma Joad and others like her held the spirits of the families together enough so that when they did split, something worthwhile remained to contribute to the larger collective organism formed of the pieces of the

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27 Lisca, op. cit., p. 159.
splintered family units. 29 Then the strengths and the values of the family units are carried as gametes to the larger collective organism that is born of love of mankind and unity and brotherhood of all. 30 But the individual does not lose his complete individuality, because he becomes stronger than himself by wholehearted participation in the group. Love of all may supersede love of family or love of self. 31

Tom, like Ma, is reluctant to give up his individuality and his familial loyalty; but by the conclusion of the novel, Tom has undergone complete conversion. He, after killing Casy's slayer, hides in a cave; but at last departs from the cave and his family, because his younger sister Ruthie has told some children that her brother killed a man. In Tom and Ma's final interview, Tom's conversion to the new faith is apparent. Tom explains to Ma that Casy is correct in maintaining that we (all people) may share one soul. Even after one's death, he is still present in the way people think and behave.

But neither Tom nor Casy was content to leave the matter at the mere acceptance of the oversoul. Both were active, not passive, individuals. They could not resign themselves to the woods just to contemplate the beauty of the oversoul idea, as some Emersonian followers might have done. Tom and Casy are the leaders of their people; Casy, first, then Tom, after Casy's death. Tom's and Casy's education and spiritual insight are

29 Lisca, op. cit., p. 172.
30 Fontenrose, op. cit., pp. 71-72.
31 Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 244-246.
completed sooner than their people's. Tom's sense of social justice has matured by the conclusion of the novel. He wants to work with his people, to organize them against the crushing systems; and he will fight to lead them out of the wilderness. True, as he confesses to Ma Joad, he may die in the process. Many may die; but so long as the ultimate goal is accomplished, he will survive and so will those who die with him for their cause. They will survive in the sense of the oversoul. The value of an idea lies in its eventual success, not in its immediate results.

Tom's task to educate the remainder of his people will not be an easy one. He has difficulty in convincing his own family; but by the conclusion of the novel, the Joad family, at least, has been converted. They are reduced to the lowest possible level, economically and psychologically. The family unit has disintegrated in spite of Ma's efforts. There remains nothing else to do but accept the others as a part of themselves, for they have learned through all their travels and troubles that poor people are good people; and as Ma says:

"I'm learnin' one thing good, . . . Learnin' it all a time, ever' day. If you're in trouble or hurt or need — go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help — the only ones. . . ." 33

The final triumph of the Joads over selfish interests and regard for the family unit first comes in the final scene, when the flood forces them to abandon everything they have and flee with no specific destination in mind. Ma just has faith

32 Moore, op. cit., p. 72.
33 Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, op. cit., p. 335.
that someplace will be available for them, and she pushes on. They find shelter in a barn where a father and son are also taking shelter. The old man is sick and can not eat any solid food, so Rose of Sharon feeds him from her breast. Though offensive to many puritanical readers, this scene serves for Steinbeck as an oracular image predicting the final triumph of the people only if they sustain and nourish one another.34 Out of the depth of desperation comes the greatest assertion of human faith.35 Since Rose of Sharon can not be the mother of a natural family unit (The child of her and Connie is stillborn, and the family unit has died into the larger collective organism.), she is symbolically the mother of this new infant.36

Throughout the novel is the assertion of a Whitmanian faith in the common man and in his directions. Even when reduced to the depth of poverty, man en masse has a certain built-in apparatus that causes his nature to seek unity and comfort in helping and sympathizing with his fellowmen. Steinbeck felt that man's natural state of goodness had somehow been corrupted by organized institutions, and he examined four of these and illustrated their failure to cope with the problems of society, particularly with the migrant workers' problems.37 Steinbeck felt that the goodness of man reasserts itself when unhindered by the organized institutions of church, government,

34Lisca, op. cit., p. 177.
35Fontenrose, op. cit., p. 69.
36Ibid., p. 74.
37French, op. cit., p. 108.
religion, and private enterprise. In the roadside groups of migrants, he illustrated the basic essentials for building worlds. Lonely and separated from the land, the migrants are united by their similar situation. Steinbeck describes them, thus:

And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together. . . ; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. . . .

Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus. . . .

And as the worlds moved westward they were more complete and better furnished, for their builders were more experienced in building them.

A certain physical pattern is needed for the building of a world — water, a river bank, a stream, a spring, or even a faucet unguarded. And there is needed enough flat land to pitch the tents, a little brush or wood to build the fires. . . .

By the time they reached California, the dispossessed had learned much about democratic government and were quick to recognize its absence from California. There they found themselves treated worse than beasts of burden. At least men who own workhorses care for those animals, feed and stable them. The migrants found themselves driven from place to place, so that they could not qualify for any relief; worked long and laborious hours, when there was work; left to live wretchedly in the Hoovervilles; which were often burned by vigilantes who did not want them at all in California.

At last, reduced to the lowest degree of desperation,

jobless, with all their possessions destroyed by the flood, the Joads, at least, are ready to unite with the other common men, and by force, if necessary, make establishments recognize the basic rights of men.

Although Steinbeck thought at the time of writing this novel that the solution to the migrants' problems lay in giving them small landholdings, he was not a lawgiver. In his opinion, the rights of men are essentially those of the democratic creed; they are also the rights that continue to reassert themselves when men are deprived of them by systems. One of these rights is landownership; this gives a man dignity, provided that the landholding is not too large for him to love and attend. If he is denied that right and that dignity, he will revolt and take by force what is by nature rightfully his.
CHAPTER IV: MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND IN EAST OF EDEN

Peter Lisca observes that in viewing Steinbeck's career, one is forced to accept a paradox, for his earlier novels, based on his almost purely biological and naturalistic image of man, succeed in exploring and giving significance to the aspects of man which, in the hands of earlier naturalistic writers, had resulted only in degrading man. However, Lisca argues, when Steinbeck abandoned this earlier viewpoint and attempted to project his image of man based on such more conventional notions as Christian morality and ethical integrity, he cannot seem to say anything significant.¹

Although Mr. Lisca may be right, this discussion of East of Eden, which he feels belongs to the latter division of Steinbeck's novels, will not attempt either to prove or to disprove his thesis. For regardless of whether Steinbeck's image of man is based on his naturalistic and biological view of man or of whether his image of man is based on the more conventional notions such as Christian morality and ethical integrity, Steinbeck always views man in his relationship to land. Maybe, though, his shift in basis for interpreting his image of man has something to do with the special emphasis on moral implications that man's relationship to the land has in East of Eden.

Indeed, Steinbeck seems to be saying in *East of Eden* that a man who is truly moral loves the land and has a good, healthy relationship with his soil.

The novel is a gigantic endeavor on Steinbeck's part to trace the progress of three generations of Americans. He does this by juxtaposing two families — the Hamiltons and the Trasks. Several times in the novel, there seems to be little connection between the two; however, they have at least one similarity: the theme of man's relationship to the land can be traced in both families.

This chapter will restrict itself to a discussion of that theme as it appears in the attitudes and actions of six characters: Samuel Hamilton, Cyrus Trask, Charles Trask, Adam Trask, Aron Trask, and Caleb Trask. Only one member of the Hamilton family will be considered because the members of the second and third generations of Hamiltons, although they in no way oppose the theme, are not as fully developed as the Trask characters are.

Steinbeck opens the novel by giving a moving description of the Salinas Valley as he remembers it from his childhood. Writing fondly of the valley, Steinbeck reveals his own intense love for the land. F. W. Watt observes:

Nowhere else does Steinbeck's knowledge and love of the Salinas Valley show to more advantage. The book's lyrical opening evocation of the Valley as the author remembers it from childhood is matched again and again later in the book, by personally felt descriptions of the scene in every season and every hour of the day and night. . . .

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The Salinas Valley is not always the richest and most productive valley. Instead, it is a valley where:

The water came in a thirty-year cycle. There would be five or six wet and wonderful years when there might be nineteen to twenty-five inches of rain, and the land would shout with grass. Then would come six or seven pretty good years of twelve to sixteen inches of rain. And then the dry years would come, and sometimes there would be only seven or eight inches of rain. The land dried up and the grasses headed out miserably a few inches high and great bare scabby places appeared in the valley. . . . The land cracked and the springs dried up and the cattle listlessly nibbled dry twigs. . . .

As in any other alternating good times and bad times, people always tend to forget the one in the presence of the other. So in the dry years:

. . . the farmers and the ranchers would be filled with disgust for the Salinas Valley. . . . And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, . . .

And then when the wet years came, "... they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way. . . ."

After giving his opening description of the Salinas Valley, Steinbeck gives a brief history of the landowners. The first settlers in the Valley were Indians, of whom Steinbeck writes, thus:

First there were Indians, an inferior breed without energy, inventiveness, or culture, a people that lived on grubs and grasshoppers and shellfish, too lazy to hunt or fish. They ate what they could pick up and planted nothing. . . .

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 6
6 Ibid.
These Indians were apparently willing to take the meager offerings of the land without bothering to help the land realize its full potential. Therefore, both these Indians and the land remained unimproved.

Since the Indians were not too interested in the land, they did not offer a great deal of resistance to the conquering Spaniards, who were the next owners of the Salinas Valley. Steinbeck writes of them, thus:

... the hard, dry Spaniards came exploring through, greedy and realistic, and their greed was for gold or God. They collected souls as they collected jewels. They gathered mountains and valleys, rivers and whole horizons, the way a man might now gain title to building lots. These tough, dried-up men moved restlessly up the coast and down. Some of them stayed on grants as large as principalities, given to them by Spanish kings who had not the faintest idea of the gift....

Neither the Indians nor the Spaniards loved the land the way the next owners did. The Americans were driven to occupy and control the land by a greed even greater than the greed of the Spaniards, but they brought a certain love for the earth which caused their powers of creativity to flower as they worked in the soil to help it realize its full potential. In so doing, they received in return many benefits from the land. The land did not always reward them materially; but it made them spiritually, morally, psychologically, and creatively richer.

Many of the Americans arrived from Europe, overcome with an insatiable appetite for land. Perhaps remembering that land-ownership in feudal Europe meant wealth and family position, these land-starved Americans seized the vast western land, taking acres

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7Ibid.
and acres of dry barren soil and remaining just as poor, if not poorer, than they had been in Europe on far fewer acres of land. They had to fight and work hard to make their new land yield just enough to support their families, if they were not fortunate enough to obtain the best land in the Valley. Yet, though the task seemed almost impossible, they did survive.

Steinbeck commends them on their venturesome spirit, thus:

I don’t know whether it was a divine stupidity or a great faith that let them do it. Surely such venture is nearly gone from the world. And the families did survive and grow. They had a tool or a weapon that is also nearly gone, or perhaps it is only dormant for a while. It is argued that because they believed thoroughly in a just, moral God they could put their faith there and let the smaller securities take care of themselves as individuals, because they knew beyond doubt that they were valuable and potentially moral units — because of this they could give God their own courage and dignity and then receive it back. Such things have disappeared perhaps because men do not trust themselves any more, . . .

Whether a "divine stupidity" or a "great faith" motivated these people, whatever motivated them, Steinbeck seems to feel, was divine in quality. Certainly Mr. Steinbeck finds their adventure admirable and is saddened by the possibility that such spirit seems dormant or dead in Americans today.

Mr. Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck's maternal grandfather, was one of those adventuresome Irish immigrants who came to the Salinas Valley about thirty years before the turn of the century (1870). Steinbeck writes of his grandfather's coming, thus:

I don’t know what directed his steps toward the Salinas Valley. It was an unlikely place for a man from a green country to come to, but he came about thirty years before the turn of the century and he brought with him his tiny Irish wife, a tight hard
little woman humorless as a chicken. . . . 9

There is a slight implication in these words that Steinbeck felt the footsteps of the immigrants were directed toward the new land almost in the same manner that birds migrate. The movement seems to be instinctually controlled, and its cause is inexplicable in scientific terms.

At any rate, Samuel Hamilton came; and he could not have been more unlucky, seemingly, in the land he took for himself and his family. By the time he arrived in Salinas Valley, all the rich bottom land had been claimed. What was left for the Hamiltons was the poorest sort of land in the barren foothills to the east of what is now King City.

All Samuel Hamilton's creative imagination was required to make this land yield even a meager subsistence for his family. Yet the land's barrenness seemed to bring out the best in Sam Hamilton. Instead of despairing, Samuel became the "wit" of the Valley, maybe in order to keep himself from despairing. Instead of dulling, his creative genius became sharpened. In his struggle to draw from the land enough for himself and his family to subsist on, Samuel invented many machines:

He found quite soon that even if he had ten thousand acres of hill country he could not make a living on the bony soil without water. His clever hands built a well-boring rig, and he bored wells on the lands of luckier men. He invented and built a threshing machine and moved through the bottom farms in harvest time, threshing the grain his own farm would not raise. . . . 10

Even if his inventions, brought about by his contest with the

9 Ibid., p. 9.
10 Ibid., p. 10.
land, did not make him rich, from them he gained the respect and love of every man in the Salinas Valley. His material riches were small, but he abounded in rewards which can not be measured in terms of monetary value.

In his never-ending struggle to eke out a living from the soil, Samuel grew to love the land. The barren hills of the Salinas replaced his memory of the green country from whence he came.

When he received the letter from one of his children suggesting that he and Liza come to visit for awhile, he realized that the children have planned this, that they considered his life over and wanted to make the remainder of his days as comfortable as possible. Samuel was with his son Tom when he received the letter; and before he said anything to Tom, he walked away for a little distance and took a tender farewell of his land:

There had been a little rain and a fuzz of miserly grass had started up. Halfway up the hill Samuel squatted down and took up a handful of the harsh gravelly earth in his palm and spread it with his forefinger, flint and sandstone and bits of shining mica and a frail rootlet and a veined stone. He let it slip from his hand and brushed his palms. He picked a spear of grass and set it between his teeth and stared up the hill to the sky. A gray nervous cloud was scurrying eastward, searching for trees on which to rain.

After doing this, Samuel, letting them think that he is unaware of their decision to let him spend the rest of his life visiting among them, decided to cooperate with his children. In deciding to do so, he also decided that his life was near an end. Leaving

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"Ibid., p. 288."
the ranch was difficult for him because:

Places were very important to Samuel. The ranch was a relative, and when he left it he plunged a knife into a darling. But having made up his mind, Samuel set about doing it well. He made formal calls on all of his neighbors, the old-timers who remembered how it used to be and how it was. And when he drove away from his old friends they knew they would not see him again, although he did not say it. He took to gazing at the mountains and the trees, even at faces, as though to memorize them for eternity.  

Samuel had grown so close to the land that he tells it goodbye with the same amount of feeling as he tells his old friends goodbye. He had a strange affinity with the land that makes him similar to Joseph Wayne. He was able to locate the presence of water with his wand, and he detected the presence of evil in the Valley with the advent of Cathy Trask. His unity with the land is intense. As he told Adam Trask, when he visited the Trask family for the last time:

"I love that dust heap," Samuel said. "I love it the way a bitch loves her runty pup. I love every flint, the plow breaking outcroppings, the thin and barren topsoil, the waterless heart of her. Somewhere in my dust heap there's a richness."  

But Samuel knew when to quit struggling with the land. With his daughter Una's death, a zest for living left Samuel Hamilton, even if his love for the land never left him; so in accepting the fact that he deserves a rest, as Adam Trask advises him, Samuel accepts the fact that his life is over, that the time has come to stop struggling to live, and that the time has come for someone else to assume the pleasure and the burden that he is

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12 Ibid., p. 293.
13 Ibid., p. 297.
Samuel Hamilton was a believable character, not so much symbolizing anything as all the Trask characters do; so his relationship to the land is more plausible and less exaggerated than the Trasks' relationships to it are.

In Connecticut, just after the Civil War, Cyrus Trask returned to his farm. After completing a very short term in the military service, Cyrus's memory of his actual military activities, which were nominal, began conveniently to fade. Cyrus began to build an image of himself as a military expert who had been engaged in almost every major battle in the Civil War. He became an authority on military matters, and eventually gained prominence even in the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic). Cyrus's military life interests us here only in that he ran his farm and his family upon the same basis that, he felt, an army should be run.

In Cyrus Trask, one can not observe a man who loves the land and tries tenderly to get it to realize its full potential. Quite the contrary, Cyrus Trask, though a devoted farmer, is not devoted to the land, but to a selfish game which somehow satisfies Trask. Between him and his land, one can not observe a mutually beneficial relationship. His relationship to the land is comparable to his relationship to his second wife, Alice. Alice meets his sexual demands uncomplainingly, performs her duties as a housewife and as a mother uncomplainingly, and serves her husband as a listener who never voices an opinion of her own. She succeeds in reducing her personality to nothing. Only a few traces are
given in the novel that she has any private thoughts or opinions. Occasionally, Adam (her stepson) would catch her smiling to herself. Steinbeck ties the farm and the wife together in a passage which describes Adam's feelings concerning the farm when he returns from military duty:

It was a grim farm and a grim house, unloved and unloving. It was no home, no place to long for or to come back to. Suddenly Adam thought of his stepmother — as unloved as the farm, adequate, clean in her way, but no more wife than the farm was a home. 14

As if a joke of the fates or as if the land strikes back at Cyrus somehow because of the way he has used it, Adam, Cyrus's favorite son, does not love him. Neither does Adam have any real interest in the military nor in the farm. Again his selfish dream of Adam's being in the military causes Cyrus to practically force him into joining the army. Cyrus has no more consideration for human beings, even the ones he thinks he loves, than he does for the land. His attitude toward the land and his treatment of it are reflected in his human relationships regardless of whether a causal link between the attitude and the human relationships exists.

Cyrus's relationship to the land is directly opposed to Samuel Hamilton's. Samuel's is untiring, loving, and patient, even though the land yields to him very little materially. Cyrus's is demanding, impatient, and unloving; and though the land produces for him materially, he remains a person whose life is built on lies and selfishly perpetuated. His life seems very barren when it is contrasted with Samuel Hamilton's life.

14 Ibid., pp. 64-65
Charles Trask, also Cyrus's son, was not chosen to be a participant in Cyrus's selfish dream. Ironically, Charles wanted to be chosen. Charles loved Cyrus and was jealous of the favor that Cyrus obviously bestowed upon Adam.

When Adam is sent away to service and Cyrus is spending his last days accumulating a fortune, dishonestly, Charles assumes the responsibility of caring for the farm. Charles, though not as selfish as Cyrus, is no more capable of loving the land than Cyrus was. Charles has never really known what being loved is like; therefore, whether he is dealing with farm or woman, he does so without love. If he is interested in fulfilling his sexual appetite, he visits the whorehouse. He remains afraid of becoming involved with a woman who could give him special love outside of just satisfying his sexual appetite; and though he writes half-jokingly to Adam about marrying, he does not do so.

Like his father, Charles demands of both woman and land satisfaction of an appetite. From woman, he demands sexual satisfaction. From the land, he demands an antidote for his loneliness. He goes about getting his satisfaction from the farm by working so hard that he has little time for leisure, little time for thought or loneliness.

Charles is not well liked by his neighbors, but he is respected by most of them:

The village people might denounce his manner of life, but one thing he had which balanced his ugly life even in their eyes. The farm had never been so well run. Charles cleared land, built up his walls, improved his drainage, and added a hundred acres to the farm. More
than that, he was planting tobacco, and a long new tobacco barn stood impressively behind the house. For these things he kept the respect of his neighbors. A farmer cannot think too much evil of a good farmer. Charles was spending most of his money and all of his energy on the farm. 15

In spite of the fact that Charles kept the farm well, the Trask home takes on the appearance of Charles's interior, chaotic loneliness:

The Trask house had never been gay, but lived only by Charles it took on a gloomy, rustling decay. . . . Charles developed a restlessness that got him out at dawn. He worked the farm mightily because he was lonely. Coming in from his work, he gorged himself on fried food and went to bed and to sleep in the resulting torpor. 16

Charles receives little satisfaction from the land. Perhaps he works hard enough to make his loneliness slightly more bearable; however, at the end of his life, he leaves all his amassed fortune to his brother, Adam, whom he had not seen in over ten years and for whom he felt a type of love mixed with jealousy, and Adam's wife, Cathy, whom Charles recognized for what she was — a prostitute — and who, as Charles knew she probably would, had left Adam shortly after her twins were born. Willing that his fortune be divided between Adam and Cathy, Charles may have been attempting to get a last laugh at Adam; but how meager is a man's life if he has no more than this to leave even as a joke? Charles was a materially successful farmer, but the land certainly did not do for him what it did for Samuel Hamilton, who loved it.

15 Ibid., p. 54.
16 Ibid., p. 46.
At least on one occasion in Charles's life, the land's striking out against his treatment of it can be seen. Charles is removing rocks from the land when he encounters a particularly stubborn boulder, which resists his strength. Charles pits his entire force against the rock in his determination not to be outdone. Suddenly the rock gives away and, in so doing, inflicts a wound upon Charles's forehead. When the wound heals, it leaves:

... a long and crinkled scar, and while most scar tissue is lighter than the surrounding skin, Charles' scar turned dark brown. ... 

The wound had not worried Charles, but the scar did. It looked like a long fingermark laid on his forehead. ...

This scar is the "mark of Cain" for Charles, branding him and setting him off from everyone else in his loneliness. Material benefits are not denied him, but he remains a spiritually impoverished person until his death.

Charles's brother, Adam, had never been interested in the Trask farm in Connecticut. Because of his unpleasant childhood fears and memories associated with the place, Adam is not contented there even after his father's death has left him and Charles very rich men. Too many unhappy events are too closely associated with the place, so Adam begins to dream and to talk to Charles about their selling out and moving to California. Charles will have no part of the plan, so he and Adam quarrel frequently and Adam leaves periodically.

Adam learns early in life to hide his dreams for fear of having them crushed; but when Cathy Ames crawls half-alive to the doorstep of the Trask farmhouse and Adam nurses her

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17 Ibid., p. 47.
back to health, he begins to hope and dream again. Not only that, but he takes steps to make his dreams realities. Before, he had been an inactive dreamer; but now Cathy changes that, as he later tells Samuel Hamilton:

"A kind of light spread out from her. And everything changed color. And the world opened out. And a day was good to awaken to. And there were no limits to anything. And the people of the world were good and handsome. And I was not afraid any more."

Regardless of whether or not Cathy is the total embodiment of evil in the novel, the truth remains that she was good for Adam, at least for a little while.

Adam falls blindly in love with her and attributes to her all the grand qualities that she does not possess, and she consents to become his wife (out of fear that her past will be revealed). Against Charles's strongest warnings, Adam and Cathy marry and move to the Salinas Valley.

Adam arrives in Salinas as full of hope and expectation as that first Adam must have been in the Garden of Eden, and he is:

... not only fully aware of the significance of his name, but is consciously trying to make a new garden of Eden in a valley which, as Samuel discovers while drilling, lies over the remnant of "another world" which casts its shadow on the present one...

Full of his dream to build a new Eden, this new Adam goes about the task of selecting a choice plot of land. He can afford to be very selective because he has inherited a fortune.

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18 Ibid., p. 170.

Soon after arriving in the Salinas Valley, his memory of the Trask farm in Connecticut begins to fade:

In his mind a darkness was settling over his memory of Connecticut. Perhaps the hard flat light of the West was blotting out his birthplace. When he thought back to his father's house, to the farm, the town, to his brother's face, there was a blackness over all of it. And he shook off the memories.\(^{20}\)

Like Samuel Hamilton, Adam seems to be instinctively moved toward the western land; and as soon as he gets there, his memory of the eastern one fades quickly.

Although Adam goes through the motions of being carefully selective, from the first the old Sanchez place attracts him. He is very deliberate and careful because:

Where Adam settled he intended to stay and to have his unborn children stay. He was afraid he might buy one place and then see another he liked better, and all the time the Sanchez place was drawing him. With the advent of Cathy, his life extended long and pleasantly ahead of him. But he went through all the motions of carefulness. He drove and rode and walked over every foot of the land. . . .\(^{21}\)

No one could have shown more enthusiasm for the new place than Adam did; but Cathy did not share his dream; and although Adam imposed it upon her for awhile, as soon as the twins (Aron and Caleb) are born, Cathy shoots her husband, leaves him and the twins, and goes to the city Salinas, where she resumes her old occupation of prostitution.

Since Adam's dream has never been a selfish one, but one that flowered and lived because of Cathy, his world shatters; he falls back into his private dream-world and makes no further


attempt to build a garden on his land. For many years, he lets the land lie fallow, as fallow as he, himself, is. Samuel Hamilton does all in his power to encourage Adam to go on living, to build the new Eden anyway, but Adam tells him:

"... I think that kind of energy is gone out of me. I can't feel the pull of it. I have money enough to live. I never wanted it for myself. I have no one to show a garden to..."

Adam never builds the new garden of which he dreams. Eventually, though, he does come back to life, halfway at least; but he rents the farm and moves his family into Salinas.

Only once again in his life does Adam have any more to do with farming in any way. He does venture to buy the ice plant in Salinas and experiments with freezing farm products in order to ship them to the East during the winter months. Again, his venture to make his dreams come true fails. But Adam is accustomed to failure. The loss of money does not bother him. The death of his dreams disturbs him more; so again he is beaten back into a dream world, where he creates dreams that can not be shattered so long as they are not touched. He makes no more dynamic efforts to realize his dreams.

Man's relationship to the land can also be observed, to some extent, in Adam's twin sons, Caleb and Aron.

Aron, like his father, is more of a dreamer than a realist; but he is a much more selfish dreamer than Adam. From the time when he is a very small boy, Aron has little or no interest in the land or in farming. His dreaming has taken a different turn.

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 272.\]
First, in Salinas, he fancies himself as a very self-righteous minister-to-be whose mission is to save all humanity, whose flaws and weaknesses he finds so despicable. Aron finds the idea of being a farmer unthinkable. When Abra, his young girlfriend, suggests that they could marry and run Adam's farm, the following conversation ensues:

"No," Aron said quickly.
"Why not?"
"I'm not going to be a farmer and you're not going to be a farmer's wife." 23

Interest in the farm does not come to Aron until he is a very unhappy boy at Stanford University. Aron does not fit with the group, perhaps because he is so holy, so self-righteous; at any rate, he moves out of the dormitory to a private room. At this time, Aron starts to build his dream around land. He ideally pictures his relationship to the land, thus:

He remembered that Abra had once suggested that they go to live on the ranch, and that became his dream. He remembered the great oaks and the clear living air, the clean sage-laced wind from the hills and the brown oak leaves scudding. He could see Abra there, standing under a tree, waiting for him to come in from his work. And it was evening. There, after work of course, he could live in purity and peace with the world, cut off by the little draw. He could hide from ugliness — in the evening. 24

But Aron is never to realize any of his dreams; so much a dreamer is he that he can not cope with reality enough to survive in this world. When he learns the truth about his mother, whom he thought was dead and buried in the East, Aron is totally unable to face the situation realistically. As Abra tells Cal

23 Ibid., p. 448.
24 Ibid., p. 524.
about Aron:

"He couldn't stand to know about his mother because that's not how he wanted the story to go — and he wouldn't have any other story. So he tore up the world. It's the same way he tore me up — Abra — when he wanted to be a priest." 25

Perhaps fortunately, Aron is killed during World War I; at any rate, he is the type of dreamer that can never function in realistic situations.

Caleb is the exact opposite of his twin. He is obviously a realist. He has his mother's ability to control situations and people. From his childhood, he shows a genuine interest in farming. Even after the Trask family moves to Salinas, Cal continues to hope for the day when his father will allow him to take over the farm. As Aron shows little interest in the farm until he enters college, Cal's claim to farming it eventually seems fairly safe.

However, Cal loves farming the land in a realistic way; and he is not opposed to making money from his labors. Cal is interested in farming his father's land in order to earn enough money to compensate for his father's loss of $15,000 in his unsuccessful freezing experiment. Will Hamilton, Samuel's son, dissuades him from actually farming the land and persuades him to be partners with him in a business venture, which means making a profit off the bean farmers and the war. Cal's gift to his father was neither appreciated nor accepted; and when Adam rejected it, Cal showed just how much the actual money meant to him by burning it.

25 Ibid., p. 578.
Because the characters in *East of Eden*, particularly the Trask characters, are individuals first, types second, and also symbols, at times their behavior seems to be slightly exaggerated. Most of these characters are clearly based upon the Genesis story of the crime of Cain and its moral implications.

Thus far, this chapter has attempted to interpret the characters and their relationship to the land as real characters, not as types or symbols. However, if one does interpret *East of Eden* on the allegorical level, there are further implications regarding man's relationship to the land. Traditionally, Cain was a farmer; and Abel, a herdsman. In *East of Eden*, the "Cain" figures are inclined toward the soil. Cyrus, Charles, and Caleb Trask are quite early identified as men of the earth, tillers of the soil. The "Abel" figures, Adam and Aron Trask, are identified as having an interest more in animals than in the soil. True, both Adam and Aron have a relationship to the land, but both characters never become so intimately involved with the land at anytime as the "Cain" figures do. Adam and Aron see the land more in an idealistic fashion than in any other way. For them, the land is an object that they manipulate in a dream. When Adam merges from an "Abel" figure to an "Adam" figure, his interest in land becomes more nearly real, at least for a time.

The "Cain" figures, as selfish, lonely, and jealous as they might be, have far more in common with humanity. As a matter

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of fact, they are the fathers of humanity. The "Abels" live only in legend, but the "Cains" of the world live in fact. The "Abels" beget no one. Although Adam Trask served as father to the twins, Cathy later tells him that he is not their father; and even if Cathy's word might not be credited, the truth remains, according to Steinbeck's narrative, that Cathy spent her wedding night in Charles's bed, not Adam's. Aron, the second "Abel" figure, dies in the war, leaving behind no offsprings.

The "Abels" of the novel are abstract idealists, and sometimes they do not seem nearly as appealing as the "Cains." In their dream-worlds, they often are very inconsiderate, selfish people. At least the "Cains" are real; maybe they are selfish, jealous, lonely, and sometimes murderous; but always, they are real.

Caleb is the most realistically portrayed member of the Trask family. He is symbolic of the modern Cain. The more ancient characters who symbolized Cain (Cyrus and Charles Trask) may have not had the choice granted by Lee's translation of the Hebrew word \textit{timshel}. Perhaps, as Mr. Watt suggests, the meaning of the word \textit{timshel} is "... altered by increasing understanding, so that what seemed blind compulsions in Adam's generation can be comprehended and controlled in Caleb's..."\textsuperscript{27} The final meaning of the word for Cal is that his wicked deeds will not prevent him from choosing to do good in the future.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27}Watt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 99.

The older Cains, Cyrus and Charles, perhaps because of their restricted interpretation of the word timshel, felt that they had no choice in whether or not they triumphed over sin; and therefore, they vented their selfishness, loneliness, and jealousy by working in the soil. Because of their hopelessness, they did not love the soil or anything else; but Caleb, the new Cain, the modern man, with his increased understanding involving his power to choose between good and evil, now in the knowledge of his power to triumph over sin, can really come to love the land and receive from the soil its highest blessings that cannot be evaluated in monetary terms. In Caleb Trask, can be seen a potential Samuel Hamilton with regard to feelings for land.
CONCLUSION

In Steinbeck's opinion, man is born with, and controlled by, more instincts than his mind can fathom or explain; and one of the most basic of these instincts is his strong attraction to, and deep reverence for, the land. Steinbeck viewed this instinct or drive — which first compels man upon beholding it, to feel a mysterious religious reverence for the land; then to love it with a desire akin to a sexual passion; and finally, from the products of his union with the land, to feed himself and his family — as a part of the broader instinct for survival.

Man's most primitive forms of religious worship stem from his inexplicable reverence for the land. In his desire for comfort and for a greater understanding of the universe, man is impelled to regard certain portions of land as fetishes, these places naturally differing from individual to individual. The characters in all four novels examined in this paper regard certain places as having supernatural powers and seek comfort from them: Joseph, in the glade; Lennie and George, in the bushes by the river; Tom Joad, in a cave, and Casy, in the wilderness; and Aron Trask, in the dream-image of his ideal farm. At times, the land itself, all of it, seems to possess the power of comforting, teaching, rewarding, and punishing just as the gods do; and when treated well by man, the land seems to possess a fetishistic power of restoring his natural goodness when it becomes tarnished by too much civilization.
It may be that man considers the earth, the natural grave for all past humanity, a totem; and thinking of it thus, he is inclined to worship his ancestry through his love and care of the land.

Man, innately inclined toward the soil, has an appetite for land; for working in it; and from it, producing enough nourishment for himself and his family. From satisfying this appetite, man becomes nobler, happier, and more beneficial to himself and his society; however, overindulging this appetite reduces man morally, psychologically, and socially. Total denial of this appetite results in a moral sickness, and the body of man revolts against whatever prohibits him from fulfilling this desire. As the white corpuscles of his body rush to the scene of any foreign material that invades that body, so does all man's energies rush in unison to defeat whatever seeks to deny and denies him the right to own land and feed himself from its products.

Man without land is sick with loneliness, fear, and insecurity. One man alone deprived of land can not do much to combat the sickness. He may dream, but this does not solve his problems; or he may form friendships which may, in part, compensate for his separation from the land. However, something within man's nature, in reaction to this separation, prompts a closer union between him and others like him. When man en masse arises to combat the foreign agent which denies his fulfilling this biological and/or psychic desire, inaction changes to action, balance is reestablished, and he takes what rightfully and
naturally belongs to him. Man alone is as one white corpuscle; he can not achieve much by fighting except death and defeat; so he dreams and drifts aimlessly; but man en masse becomes a force to be reckoned with when he moves to combat the enemy. Any system, political, economic, or religious, that dehumanizes, demoralizes, and degrades man, falls victim to the mighty forces of man en masse. It has always been so, and it shall ever be as long as man continues as a species and as long as he is moved by his dream of land.

In *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck, through the exaggerated character of Joseph Wayne, presented man's innate desire for land and his reverence for it; and he continued to present this same desire in *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *East of Eden*, though in a less exaggerated manner. In *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck became more concerned with what happens to man when this basic appetite for land is unsatisfied. In the first of these novels, Steinbeck pictured man alone as a dreamer, a defeated, inactive person who might possibly become active eventually; in the latter of the novels, he pictured man growing from a single, inactive individual to an active man en masse, viewing the solution to man's sickness as lying in his recognition of the oversoul. Steinbeck, in *East of Eden*, portrayed what he considered to be the most nearly perfect relationship between man and the land through the character Samuel Hamilton. Through Sam's relationship to the land, Steinbeck expressed his own belief that man who loves the land and works it is one who receives a deeper understanding of the
universe, the respect of his neighbors and himself, and the satisfaction of realizing his full potential as a man. The land may be stubborn and unyielding at times, but she draws from man the best that is in him when he loves her and works for her improvement. She may not always reward him materially; but she satisfies his material needs and bestows upon him all the more important blessings that do not bear dollar and cent signs.

Steinbeck's view of the man-land relationship is similar in many ways to the views held by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans. He indulged in the mood of primitivism in that he believed that untouched nature is a spiritual baptism for mankind, renewing in him all the innate instincts and longings when they become dulled by corrupt civilizations. However, Steinbeck differed from the primitivists in his belief that man is a social being and by his nature inclined to create civilizations. Steinbeck felt that the governments, systems, institutions, and laws of civilization are not bad so long as they retain the natural strengths of their creators; they become foreign attackers of his species when they lose and grow away from these natural strengths; and then man defeats them and creates others. Perhaps Steinbeck felt that corrupt civilizations are not really bad, but just a part of the natural scheme of things. After years and years of practice in building them, perhaps man will come to perfect them as he evolves further. However, the altruistic Steinbeck sometimes got the better of the naturalistic Steinbeck; and a
certain amount of resentment toward civilizations and their systems is quite obvious in The Grapes of Wrath.

Steinbeck believed, as did the agrarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, that owning and working land is man's natural right and that man becomes better for exercising that right. Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck's clearest expression of these beliefs, is somewhat a Western yeoman figure. Unlike the American agrarians before him, Steinbeck did not imply that government should be dedicated to the interests of these people exclusively. However, Steinbeck apparently felt that a government which derives its powers from a completely agrarian society is ideally the best form of government, because yeomen, through their close contact with the land, have the most admirable natural powers to transfer to their governments.

Unlike the Wild Western heroes of the Beadle novels and unlike the antiagrarians of the late nineteenth century, Steinbeck could never consider the land as man's enemy. Even land suffering and dying from drought, land stony and unproductive, Steinbeck felt to be suffering for mysterious reasons or to merely be repaying man for his abuse and his way of living. Whatever the cause of its behavior, Steinbeck felt the land behaved for the good of man as a species. Ultimately, everything that appears bad to us, such as decadent systems and dying land, serves its purpose in the scheme of the natural universe; therefore, everything that is, is right. Steinbeck believed, as did Emerson and Whitman, that man's hardships
serve to lead him to a recognition of his common humanity and to a closer link with his brothers.
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