

INTRODUCTION  
JOHN STEINBECK: THE VARIETIES OF  
READING EXPERIENCE

"There is then creative reading as well as  
creative writing."

--Emerson, "The American Scholar"

"It's almost impossible to read a fine thing  
without wanting to [write] a fine thing."

--John Whiteside, in Steinbeck's  
*The Pastures of Heaven*

From that decisive moment in childhood when he resolved to unlock the secret language of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (*ACTS*, p. xii; see *Notes* to this essay for title abbreviations), and again later when he declared his intention to become a writer in the margin of his copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Prince Otto*, John Steinbeck set in motion an appreciative disposition toward the world of books and the act of reading that remained linked in varying degrees of efficacy for the rest of his life.<sup>1</sup> In a career which had its share of personal and artistic triumphs and failures, Steinbeck's reading, his residence in the creative habitation of books (to extend his own metaphor), comprised an abiding activity. At times, this passionate involvement not only demanded as much of his attention as his writing, but even threatened to eclipse it. When, late in life, he lamented not having enough time to maintain a balanced schedule of reading, thinking and writing, he summed up his long-standing belief in their synergy.<sup>2</sup> For Steinbeck, reading and writing constituted the "creative life": at their best, as a unified field of endeavor, both were compelling acts; furthermore, in the latter stages of his career, they became redemptive processes as well.

Steinbeck's prevalent reputation (earned mainly from his fictional achievements of the 1930s) as the impersonal, objective reporter of striking farm workers and dispossessed migrants, or as the escapist popularizer of primitive folk, has obscured the roots of his intellectual background, literary interests and artistic methods.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he was an author who read to write--one who frequently depended on various kinds of

documents to supply, augment or temper his apprehension of reality. To think of him simply as an exponent of primary, empirical experience--a realist in inspiration and a journalist in execution--is to disregard his attitude toward an entire arena of vicarious experiences. Not less abundantly than physical reality, scientific observation or oral legends, the world of books provided Steinbeck with imaginative enrichment, intellectual sustenance and practical resources. Indeed, he often read so intently that the traditional distinctions between primary and secondary experience disappeared. "Certain books," he told Ben Abramson in 1936, "were realer than experience--*Crime and Punishment* was like that and *Madame Bovary* and parts of *Paradise Lost* and things of George Eliot and *The Return of the Native*. I read all of these things when I was very young and I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me."<sup>4</sup> This admission has come to stand as Steinbeck's most celebrated comment on his reading, yet it has also been treated as an anomaly. Consequently, it has been valued more for the list of specific titles than for its larger issue--the causal relationship between reading and his mind and art.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning in the early 1920s, with his derivative short stories, poems and drama (a sequel to Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*), and extending through even the most original of his publications during the next four decades, Steinbeck's reading informed his art. It was informed, that is, in the widest sense, ranging from oblique suggestions and resonant echoes to direct influences and even some shameless borrowings. This is not to accuse him of plagiarism, which he consciously avoided to the best of his knowledge and characteristically abhorred.<sup>6</sup> It is, rather, to say that being "informed" signals a wide range of interpretative possibilities for his art, and admits an enormous latitude of interaction between the ground of reality and his fictive imagination. Obviously, he never intentionally set out to steal another writer's work or slavishly duplicate what had already been done by someone else. However, as his manuscripts, letters and journals attest, in the act of composition he was vulnerable to every type of influence without always being able (or willing) to discriminate their origins. Like so many other American writers whose imaginative appetites were rapacious--Melville, Hemingway and Faulkner come to mind--Steinbeck was not above pilfering from the library of available material. Generally--and this is what matters most--he asserted imaginative dominion over those appropriated elements by transmuting them in such a way that they became his own fictive property.

Whether Steinbeck borrowed directly from his sources, which he once proposed to Berton Braley was how "literatures are

built," or whether he steeped himself in the atmosphere and "texture" of his preparatory research, reading had a "profound" effect on his work.<sup>7</sup> In fact, for a writer who has traditionally been considered an heir to the rigorously mimetic strain of Realism in American literature, it is important to note that nearly all of Steinbeck's thirty full-length books include references or allusions to other works of literature. They also show a frequent orientation toward literary models and categories, and portray a large gallery of characters in the act of reading (or commenting upon) literature (*Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Red Pony* are chief exceptions). Taken together, these referential strategies constitute an important aspect of Steinbeck's signature as a writer. They were his way of inhabiting the interior dimensions of his fiction, not only by creating a verifiable realm of historical continuity and intellectual immediacy, but also as a means of exercising his delight in fictive play.<sup>8</sup> Even *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck's most sustained non-teleological fiction, contains a self-portrait of the artist as reader: Jim Nolan's acquaintance with Plato, Herodotus, Gibbon, Macauley, Schopenhauer and others (*IDB*, p. 8), reflects his enrollment in Steinbeck's own curriculum of vital knowledge.

What differs from book to book is the visible emphasis he placed on his sources, the degree of inspiration or guidance he acknowledged from them, and the tonal effect he wished to achieve. Generally, the objective quality, contemporary social/economic content, and omniscient point of view that--together or in part--characterizes his writing through the early 1940s, camouflaged or minimized the *apparent* efficacy of his borrowings. (The comedic tone of *Tortilla Flat* certainly disguised its parallels with *Morte d'Arthur*; the constitutive voice of *The Grapes of Wrath* thoroughly subordinated Tom Collins' migrant camp reports.) And although the textual choices of characters in the act of reading were drawn from Steinbeck's own preferences, they often served ironic effects. Inordinately "bookish" characters--James Flower in *Cup of Gold* and Elizabeth McGreggor in *To a God Unknown*--are satirized as inept, or judged unprepared for the harshness of "real" life. The reading habits of others, including Junius Maltby and Richard and John Whiteside in *The Pastures of Heaven*, are portrayed as individually salutary, but communally suspect. However, in Steinbeck's later writings, from *Cannery Row* onward, there is more overt dependence on literary influences, as well as several testimonies of indebtedness. The whole drama of tradition is fittingly climaxed in the last book of his life, *America and Americans*, which extolls the virtues of reading. Such artful acknowledgements represent a culmination of his interest, and provide evidence that Steinbeck--perhaps as a bold way of compensating for his attenuated

artistic power--elevated reading to symbolic levels in the best of his post-war books.

### I. Steinbeck's Early Career

Steinbeck's sensitivity to the magical world of language and gesture which he encountered in books awakened his artistic temperament and helped sustain his decision to become a writer. His older sister remembered that the Steinbeck house on Central Avenue in Salinas was "full of books" that were always available. "The choice was ours," she said, "and there were no pressures ever put on us--for or against" (Elizabeth Ainsworth/Robert DeMott, Letter, 5 October 1979). Her recollection is corroborated by Steinbeck's statement in *Travels with Charley*, but his version also reveals another dimension. He judged that he "had a fortunate childhood for a writer," because "in the great dark walnut bookcase with the glass doors, there were strange and wonderful things to be found. My parents never offered them, and so I pilfered from that case" (*TWC*, p. 37).

Reading comprised a legacy in the Steinbeck family. It was an intellectual heritage, a qualitative factor almost atmospheric in character, which distinguished Steinbeck's childhood and provided artistic capital he drew on for the rest of his career. It has been widely acknowledged that his "bluestocking" mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, affected his early choices. She had been a country school teacher whose eclectic taste in literature was later imitated by Elizabeth McGreggor in *To a God Unknown* and Miss Molly Morgan in *The Pastures of Heaven*. To her influence must be added that of his father, John Ernst Steinbeck, who passed on a love for Greek and Roman classics to his son. Steinbeck affectionately dramatized that legacy in the penultimate chapter of *The Pastures of Heaven*: John Whiteside "always remembered how his father read to him the three great authors, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon" (*POH*, p. 165). Similarly, the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* were in the air around him, and his uncles "exuded Shakespeare" (*ACTS*, p. xi). With his sisters, especially Mary, Steinbeck read and discussed Malory's *Morte*, and spent long hours with their other favorite, Homer's *Iliad*. Behind his immediate family stood the tutelary presence of his grandfather, Samuel Hamilton. His love for and knowledge of "good writing" (*TWC*, p. 37) affected all of his children and inspired the future novelist. Steinbeck was an infant when his grandfather died in 1904, but he was such a powerful legendary figure on the maternal side of the novelist's family that Steinbeck resurrected him as the mythic hero of *East of Eden*. In that novel (the closest Steinbeck ever came to writing autobiography), Samuel is portrayed as an exemplary

reader, and the Hamiltonian habit of mind is explicitly established as Steinbeck's rightful heritage.

Thus, by the time Steinbeck graduated from Salinas High School in 1919, he had an unusually good background in world literature. Besides the Bible, Malory and Shakespeare, he had a solid grounding in ancient classics, including Tacitus, Virgil and Suetonius (later remembered as a "joy"). He had also read widely in poetry, including Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley (he was especially fond of "To a Skylark"), Robert Browning, Whitman (especially "Song of Myself"), and Tennyson (never one of his favorite poets, because he was too prim for Steinbeck's taste), as well as Californians Edwin Markham and Joaquin Miller. His interests in fiction and prose generally ran toward adventure and romance: Sir Walter Scott, Marco Polo, Alexander Dumas, Jack London, James Branch Cabell, Zane Grey, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jules Verne, Mark Twain and fugitive items like *A Tramp's Life*.<sup>9</sup> He also read Poe, Booth Tarkington, Gertrude Atherton, Harold Bell Wright, David Grayson, and acted the part of Justin Rowson in the Salinas High School commencement production of Harry Smith's comedy, *Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh*.

Steinbeck entered Stanford in September, 1919, and left after the Spring semester, 1925, without having earned a degree. The first half of his academic career was dismal: out of eight possible academic semesters from Spring, 1920, through Fall, 1923, he was enrolled twice in a total of eight courses. He withdrew from all of them, preferring instead nomadic stints as a laborer and farm hand in the country below Salinas. His second stab at college was more consistent and respectable. From Winter semester, 1923, through Spring semester, 1925, he was enrolled seven out of ten possible semesters, and earned grades or credit in 32 of 35 courses. His recent abortive attempts at writing, however, brought home to him the need for a firmer knowledge of literature and writing techniques. Accordingly, he enrolled in eleven English courses (these included several in Journalism, such as News Writing, and Feature Articles; and in Composition, such as Essay Writing, Narrative Writing, Exposition, and Oral Debate), and three Classical Literature courses, including The History of Rome, and Greek Tragedy.<sup>10</sup> Along the way, he encountered some memorable and inspiring classes--Margery Bailey's English 10, a literary survey; Professor William Herbert Carruth's English 35, Ver-sification (one of Steinbeck's six A's at Stanford); and Edith Mirrielees' English 136, Short Story Writing, which he later remembered as one of the best he ever took.<sup>11</sup> Under the enthusiastic direction of Professors Bailey and Mirrielees, Steinbeck added Boswell, Dickens, De Maupassant and Chekov to his store of formal reading.

Even in his reputable phase, however, Steinbeck did not let

Stanford dictate the terms of his real education. Like Melville, he swam in libraries; like Faulkner, college did not prevent him from pursuing his vocation. That vocation was writing, and the older Steinbeck grew, the more committed he became to building a suitable background for the task. His incipient notion of creative doubling--the bonding of reading and writing--gained enormous impetus in Bailey's and Mirrielees' classes and carried over to his own experience. In the first half of the 1920s, when he wasn't working odd jobs or on the lam from Stanford, he was reading voraciously and writing, though not always with definite direction. "I went fliberty geblut," he recalled to Pascal Covici, "and got to going to the library and reading what I wanted to read instead of what was required" (*JN*, p. 102). In one "maniacal" span in 1924, for instance, he devoured *The Book of the Dead*, and works by Molière, Ibañez, Katherine Gerould, Casanova, Rebecca West, Pushkin and Turgenev (*SLL*, p. 8). A little later, between 1924 and 1926, he plowed through some novels by Ouida, which he thought "comic stuff," studied books on magic from Stanford University's library, read Norman Douglas' *South Wind*, Ben Hecht's *Count Bruga*, fiction by Carl Van Vechten, and was already aware of Hemingway's influential style.<sup>12</sup>

In practice, though, his writing was not very successful. He could analyze "fine" writing (and, as a member of Stanford's English Club, discuss it passionately), but he could not yet produce it himself.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, his fiction showed a pronounced subservience to popular literary models. His youthful efforts, such as "A Lady in Infra-Red" (the germ of *Cup of Gold*) and "The Gifts of Iban" (by "John Stern"), were indebted to the literary fantasies of James Branch Cabell, Donn Byrne, James Stephens and Arthur Machen. In *Cup of Gold* he began to outgrow the "Cabbelyo-Byrneish preciousness" (*SLL*, p. 17), substituting instead echoes of Synge's lilting language, the descriptiveness of Alexander Esquemeling's *Buccaneers of America*, and the allure of Welsh legendary tales like *The Red Book of Hergest*. But it took several years for Steinbeck to expell the patently formulaic strain from his system, and even after several revisions the effects of imitation still linger. In this apprentice period, Steinbeck's work manifests the unconscious struggle for authority between his own sensibility and those values which he acquired through reading. Both aspects exist simultaneously in *Cup of Gold*, and in the unpublished "Murder at Full Moon." In the latter, his struggle with opposing tendencies is clearly exemplified.

This hack novel was written, he boasted, in "nine days," ostensibly to discharge a "debt" (*SLL*, p. 32). The debt was financial, though in a symbolic sense it was also literary,

because "Murder" is one of those miscarriages a young writer has to endure in order to reach a higher stage of development. The plot is youthful and thoroughly manufactured; its style is wooden and blatantly literary. The novel is slavishly influenced by Poe (Steinbeck wrote it under a *nom de plume*, "Peter Pym"), Jung's *Dementia Praecox*, and the formula detective fiction of S.S. Van Dine and others. This morbid amalgamation is, however, partly rectified by the narrator's self-parodying tone (Steinbeck called it "burlesque"), which indicates that he was not only attuned to the gothic aspects of Poe's fiction, but to the hoaxical posture of his narrative voice. In making fun of the conventions of literary consciousness, formula fiction and self-reflexiveness, Steinbeck achieved a better understanding about the nature of attribution and influence.<sup>14</sup> In making the novel's protagonist, Sergius Hoogle, a perceptive critic of literature, Steinbeck also limned the first of several reader-heroes in his fiction, characters like Mayor Orden, Doc, and Samuel Hamilton, capable of acting meaningfully on their knowledge.

Concurrently, then, Steinbeck's perceptions were changing. In *To a God Unknown*, his reliance on myth (via Frazer) and the psychology of the unconscious (via Jung) is still pronounced, but it became a functional aspect of characterization rather than an imposed structural device. Between 1929 and 1931, in addition to reading in those areas, Steinbeck wrote constantly. In the face of frequent rejections from publishers, and an increasing "disgust and lack of faith" in his own work (*SLL*, p. 45), he forged ahead. "In the last year and a half," he told Amassa Miller in December, 1931, "I have written the Dissonant Symphony, the detective story, six short stories, part of a novel that is too huge for me just now and *The Pastures of Heaven*" (*SLL*, p. 51). One of those six unpublished stories, "The White Sister of Fourteenth Street," set in New York City, shows Steinbeck's increasing facility with a more stringent, ironical strain of realism. In a letter to Katherine Beswick, Steinbeck had already adumbrated a view of tragedy that could be applied to common characters. He had discovered elements in the fiction of Dreiser (Elsie in "White Sister" is reminiscent of Carrie Meeber), O. Henry, Aldous Huxley and Ring Lardner more compatible with his emerging sensibility than the traditional Aristotelean concept, in which, he claimed, "only high persons and high causes can make high tragedy."<sup>15</sup> In addition, his recent reading of other serious artists, like Conrad, Sherwood Anderson and Hemingway, was beginning to pay dividends for his sense of theme, characterization and dialogue; and--in the story cycle form of *The Pastures of Heaven*--dividends for his execution of structure as well. Certainly, his critical eye had sharpened: he vilified the

pulp writers who lived in Carmel; announced to George Albee that Beverly Nichols' fiction made him "sick" (*SLL*, p. 49); and looked with disdain on his own "feeble and childish" productions (*SLL*, p. 51).

In 1930 Steinbeck had married Carol Henning, moved with her to Pacific Grove, on California's Monterey Peninsula, and began the most momentous epoch of his life. He entered the 1930s as a novice, despite his one published book, but ended the decade as one of its most acclaimed writers. Along the way he dedicated himself unstintingly to the development of his art. In the teeth of the Depression, "when people are broke, the first thing they give up are books."<sup>16</sup> But he continued to write anyway, managing (after the publication of *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*, in 1932 and 1933) to rekindle his faith and persevere through extreme personal and economic conditions. He also managed to launch the most intensive reading program he had ever undertaken. It was a process of education that profoundly affected his writing for the next fifteen years. He didn't add much to his private library until after 1935, when his books began making money, so he depended on the Pacific Grove Public Library and the remarkable collection of Edward F. Ricketts, whom he had met in 1930. Marine biologist, ecologist, owner of Pacific Biological Laboratory on Cannery Row, and later co-author of *Between Pacific Tides* and *Sea of Cortez*, Ricketts was a man of enormous intellectual energy, enthusiasm and knowledge. Before a fire destroyed his business in 1936, his library contained the most impressive collection of marine texts in the area, and also reflected his related interests in foreign languages, anthropology, myth, philosophy, travel, poetry, drama and fiction. In short, Steinbeck found not only a soul-mate, but also a resource for books equal to his omnivorous habits. As one observer stated, "The first time I saw John Steinbeck, he was reading a book at Ed's lab" (Joel Hedgpeth/Robert DeMott, Telephone Conversation, 16 May 1979).<sup>17</sup>

In addition to his memorable portrait, "About Ed Ricketts," the course of Steinbeck's eighteen-year relationship with Ricketts has also been brilliantly traced by Richard Astro, and further detailed by Joel Hedgpeth.<sup>18</sup> In their periods of intellectual intimacy, from 1933-1936, and again in 1940-1941, Ricketts encouraged Steinbeck's interest in new vistas of scientific thought. Thus he became the first of several intellectual mentors Steinbeck looked to for guidance during generative research periods. For instance, when Steinbeck developed his first great theory--the phalanx, or group unit--in 1933, Ricketts served as a sounding board for the writer's ideas, and contributed much biological documentation (especially the organizational patterns from Allee's *Animal Aggregations*)



necessary to establish the theory's legitimacy.<sup>19</sup> On his part--and this would remain true all his life--Steinbeck took those leads enthusiastically and burrowed not only into books on economics and sociology which Harry Moore first noticed, but also works on geography, anthropology, myth and physics. What Steinbeck unearthed from these seemingly disparate sources was "gratifying": Huntington, Spengler, Ouspenski, Jung, Briffault, Schrödinger, Planck, Bohr, Einstein and Heisenberg, he reported to Carlton Sheffield, "have all started heading in the same direction...toward my thesis. This in itself would indicate the beginning of a new phalanx or group unit."<sup>20</sup> With additional documentation from Harold Lamb, and from the holistic treatises of Boodin and Ritter, Steinbeck built a solid foundation of knowledge. In the years from 1933 to 1936 he worked furiously to translate his knowledge "into the symbolism of fiction" (*SLL*, p. 76). When philosophical thought and artistic structure finally did cohere, in "The Vigilante," "Leader of the People," *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, he completed the circuit of his intentions and added a new literary dimension to the intellectual phalanx he had drawn from.

While Ricketts performed mid-wifery for Steinbeck's ideas at this stage, it is erroneous to think Steinbeck oscillated solely in Rickett's rainbow, for his fiction of the 1930s shows other distinct literary bearings. For all his originality as a thinker and scientist, Ricketts was not a creative writer. His exciting, but eclectic, philosophical essays and his notes for *Sea of Cortez* show that he was generally more concerned with theme and content than with nuances of structure, motivation, language and texture necessary for the complexities of fiction. As a scientist, Ricketts used his sources differently from the way Steinbeck did as a novelist.

The poetry of Robinson Jeffers is a case in point. The famous line from "Roan Stallion"--"Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break/through"--instigated Ricketts' essay on transcendence, "The Philosophy of 'Breaking Through.'" Where it serves a didactic purpose for Ricketts, the same concept of breaking through (or "keying into") which Steinbeck employed in *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row*, became an organic experience, embedded in the particular visions of fictive characters. Again, in "A Spiritual Morphology of Poetry," Ricketts ranked Jeffers (on the evidence of "Signpost") as "an all vehicle mellow poet" (his highest category), because the poem expressed the "heaven-beyond-the-world-beyond-the-garden."<sup>21</sup> To regard Steinbeck's knowledge of Jeffers as simply another instance of adopting Rickett's perspective distorts the picture by reducing an occasion of creative tension to third-hand borrowing. Steinbeck discovered Jeffers--and in the full implications of that act--read him

with awe and trepidation--in 1932, before or during his final revision of *To a God Unknown*. In an "effusive" letter to his publisher, Steinbeck praised Jeffers as the greatest poet since Whitman, but also criticized his Spenglerian skepticism and his postured rebellion against cultural "taboos." The tone of his criticism is that which a writer reserves for his most respected and formidable rival. Steinbeck was defensive and proprietary about his native region, and told Ballou, with some relief, that Jeffers had failed to "write my country."<sup>22</sup> This competitive tension (wholly missing in Ricketts' view of Jeffers) gave Steinbeck license to approximate resonant qualities of Jeffers' style--notably his lyricism and sensuousness--in the final draft of his novel, and, at the same time, allowed him to feel justified that he had captured the mythic aura of California's landscape more truthfully than Jeffers had.

A similar argument about the Steinbeck/Ricketts axis can be made regarding Steinbeck's premier achievement. In one sense, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a book of such striking originality and power that questions of influence seem beside the point. The degree of felt life in this epic novel surpasses everything else in Steinbeck's canon. The fact that his sensibility and compassion were fully engaged by the scenes of human suffering he witnessed in California's migrant camps in the late 1930s only confirms that he wrote the novel at the peak of his imaginative powers. As Astro claims, we cannot "assume that the person and ideas of Ed Ricketts serve to organize the entire thematic structure" of *Grapes*.<sup>23</sup> First of all, Steinbeck espoused a more teleological and processional view of life than Ricketts was customarily comfortable with. Second, Steinbeck went farther afield in his reading of Boodin than Ricketts (who preferred *A Realistic Universe*), ultimately finding important holistic statements in *Three Interpretations of the Universe* which informed the novel (especially Chapter Fourteen). Third, Steinbeck relied heavily on the Bible for texture, diction and rhythm, rather than the texts of Oriental religion which Ricketts seemed to prefer. Fourth, Steinbeck's dependence on Tom Collins' government reports for much of the details, action and incidents (especially Chapters Twenty-Two to Twenty-Six) represent a dimension of social and institutional dynamic in which Ricketts showed little interest.<sup>24</sup> But perhaps most importantly, Steinbeck's achievement in *The Grapes of Wrath* had more to do with its radical technical conception than with the employment of a theme which he had worked over for the past six years. His structural accomplishment in the novel was conditioned by his reading fiction, an area Ricketts was simply less attuned to than Steinbeck.

The closer Steinbeck approached to a voice and stance of his

own, the more uneasy, even defensive, he became about being compared to other writers. He often claimed not to have read much contemporary literature, and in a typical disavowal, told Robert Ballou, "I just don't like fiction very much."<sup>25</sup> While it is certainly true that he tried to keep himself "immaculate" (*SLL*, p. 25) from conscious imitation when he was in the throes of composition, his categorical denials of reading novels or "recent books" are simply not true. Even if his reading was not immediately influential, his awareness of what other writers had achieved in style and form created a model context he could depart from, and, by adding to his store of fictive alternatives, increased the confidence and freedom with which he handled his own techniques. For Steinbeck, the world's novels were benchmarks for his own fictional concerns, signposts in the inexhaustible multiplicity of the imagined universe. Without belaboring the point, Malcolm Cowley's testimony is important here. Cowley was absolutely correct in claiming that, while *The Grapes of Wrath* "is not an imitative book, it could not have been written without a whole series of experiments" to guide Steinbeck: Dos Passos' *USA*, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, and Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, to name but three prominent American examples.<sup>26</sup> Add to that the epic scale and panoramic movement of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (which Steinbeck considered his favorite novel), the universality of the spiritual journey in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (which he mentions in Chapter Nine), and the fluid linguistic resources of Hargrave's *Summer Time Ends* (which Steinbeck read repeatedly, because it was "a book from which writers can learn"), and we approach a fuller realization of just how far Steinbeck's greatest fiction transcended the sphere of Ricketts' scientific influence.

Steinbeck paid an enormous price for the success of his novel, however. Writing *The Grapes of Wrath* exacted a psychic toll unprecedented in his earlier experience. (The harrowing strain is recorded in the journal which he kept during the novel's composition.) The effort temporarily exhausted both his sources and his resources: he admitted to Carlton Sheffield in November, 1939, that he had "worked" the "clumsy" novel form as far as he could "take" it, and needed to "make a new start" (*SLL*, p. 194). The opportunity for a fresh departure immediately presented itself in two forms, both closely associated with Ricketts. The first was a project for a handbook to the marine ecology of the San Francisco Bay area (the book never got beyond the preliminary stages); the second was *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*, which eventuated from the Steinbeck/Ricketts collecting trip to the Gulf of California in March and April of 1940. Ricketts was the presiding genius behind both of these scientific endeavors, but once again, Steinbeck did his homework enthu-

siastically ("studying harder than I ever did in school," he told Sheffield).

Where he had been on confident and individual ground in his recent fiction, here he was aware of intruding into another professional discipline. Ricketts' expertise was already established with *Between Pacific Tides* (1939), but Steinbeck had yet to "build some trust in the minds of biologists." Accordingly, in preparation for both topics, he told Elizabeth Otis, "I have a terrific job of reading to do" (*SLL*, p. 196). In Los Gatos, in early 1940, then later, when he was back in Pacific Grove and working at Ricketts' lab in 1941 (separated from Carol and romantically involved with Gwyn Conger), Steinbeck scoured biological texts with an eye toward establishing an encompassing ecological pattern of action. Whether Steinbeck actually read the hundreds of recondite sources included in the Phyletic Catalogue of *Sea of Cortez* (pp. 320-578) is unknown. It is certain, however, that he was thoroughly familiar with the books taken on the *Western Flyer* and with the "General References" (pp. 579-586), for which he may have provided some annotations. Indeed, in July, 1941, Steinbeck informed his Viking Press editor, Pascal Covici, that he had "found a great poetry in scientific writing," which he had tried to emulate (*S&C*, p. 31). In the collaboration between Ricketts' journal notes and his essay on non-teleological thinking (see the "Easter Sunday" chapter of *Sea of Cortez*), and Steinbeck's renewed poetical awareness that the language and structure of fiction could be redefined to accommodate an explicitly scientific subject, the result was a book of startling originality and vigor.

In the wake of Steinbeck's intense involvement with Ed Ricketts and the process of research necessary to complete *Sea of Cortez*, he further developed the belief that reading was not an "escape" from reality, but an entrance into another--usually heightened--degree of reality, such as one finds in "the rich reality of Tolstoy" or in "the glowing emotion of a poem." Each reader's intellect and emotion "keys into" the text and allows active participation in its imaginative experience. "No one has ever read *Treasure Island* or *Robinson Crusoe* objectively," he wrote, because "the chief characters in both cases are ... the skin and bones of the reader. The political satires of *Gulliver* have long been forgotten but the stories go on. The message ... of a story almost invariably dies first while the participation persists."<sup>27</sup> Steinbeck had already created this affective quality in his realistic earlier fiction, notably *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as in parts of the non-fictional *Sea of Cortez*. In the mid 1940s, however, motivated by a series of sweeping personal and psychological changes in his

life (including a violent reaction against the "crap" journalism he had written as a war correspondent for the *Herald Tribune* in 1943), Steinbeck became disenchanted with a predominantly mimetic and objective approach to fiction (*SLL*, pp. 268-281). The idea of achieving a permanent dimension of subjective transaction between reader and writer became a central goal in his aesthetic program and propelled him to experiment with a heuristic concept of writing that combined fabular, moral and personal elements.<sup>28</sup> The multiple levels of *Cannery Row*, designed so that "people can take what they can receive out of it" (*SLL*, p. 273), signified a major turn in Steinbeck's technique toward the use of reflexive structures to express consciously artistic values. *Cannery Row* is, of course, an historical section of Monterey, California; more importantly for artistic purposes, however, it is a piece of fictive geography, "a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream" (*CR*, p. 1), which invites each reader's imaginative participation. Not surprisingly, Steinbeck situates the figure of Doc (based on Ed Ricketts), a model reader and interpreter of texts, at the center of that imaginative geography. In his library at Western Biological Laboratory, Doc habitually reads and disseminates "books of all kinds" (*CR*, p. 16), particularly the Sanskrit poem *Black Marigolds*, which moves him to tears (*CR*, p. 123).

During the next few years, Steinbeck moved increasingly away from a communal vision of life toward an engagement with universal human values rooted in traditional notions of creative choice, individual consciousness and inherited legacy. The legendary struggles of exemplary figures such as Jesus Christ, Joan of Arc and Emiliano Zapata captured his interest as potential literary subjects.<sup>29</sup> His reading and background research into their lives helped crystallize his belief, espoused in a letter to John O'Hara in 1949, that the writer's main duty is to "preserve and foster the principle of the preciousness of the individual mind" (*SLL*, p. 360). From 1945 to 1951 Steinbeck's reading was a vital force in his individual growth. In 1948 and 1949, for example, reeling from the devastating effects of Ed Ricketts' death and his divorce from Gwyn, which enervated his creative will, Steinbeck began to regard reading as a means of personal salvation. He asked Pascal Covici to get him "complete catalogues of Everyman, Random House and other libraries" so he could replace the books he needed for work which Gwyn refused to relinquish. "Isn't it odd," he continued to Covici, "that having stripped me of everything else, she also retains the tools of the trade from which she is living?" (*SLL*, p. 349).<sup>30</sup> The reconstruction of his personal library and the habit of mind that regarded books as essential stands in large part behind

the best of Steinbeck's remaining writing. Whereas in the past, Steinbeck's reading served a generally supportive function in his novels, now, with his acceptance of a new set of epistemological values, the act of reading itself became a thematic subject in his work and formed a strata of truth no less important than outward reality. This subjective, or reflexive, interior dimension was especially important in *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's major achievement in the post-war years.<sup>31</sup> An examination of how his reading figured into that novel should help clarify its purpose and provide a practical view of Steinbeck's imagination at work.

## II. *East of Eden*: An example of Reading Influences

Beginning with his reflexive tonal use of *Black Marigolds* and his thematic employment of the *Tao Teh Ching* in *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck's attitude toward reading as a way of apprehending the world and as a means of framing experience not only became more assertive, but took on an almost numinous cast. In 1951, while he was writing *East of Eden*, he published a brief essay, "Some Random and Randy Thoughts on Books." Aside from humorous and occasionally prophetic statements about commercial marketing procedures, Steinbeck also observed that a book is "sacred"--"one of the few authentic magics our species has created."<sup>32</sup> The sacrosanct nature of books and the creative tradition of reading formed a strong impulse in Steinbeck's imagination during the *East of Eden* period, and provided him with various direct sources to sustain his resurrection of an earlier era, as well as the inspiration to conceive the novel in a self-conscious fictive tradition that he saw extending from Cervantes through Melville, Sherwood Anderson and himself. His excursions into reading produced a heightened sense of purpose in *East of Eden* that complemented his desire to continue the survival of his family's intellectual legacy, and helps to explain why he wrote the novel as though it were his "last book," a synthesis of everything he was capable of achieving--"all styles, all techniques, all poetry" (*JN*, p. 8). "This is not a new nor an old fashioned book," he wrote on 20 March 1951, "but my culling of all books plus my own invention" (*JN*, p. 31).

Because of its autobiographical nature, *East of Eden* announced a metamorphosis in Steinbeck's fictional vision, technique and temperament. His notion of fictional propriety evolved toward a more open, expressive form as a vehicle to address a new range of personal convictions. He refused to bow any longer to what he considered the prevailing technique of Realism--"The squeamishness of not appearing in one's own

book," and insisted that in *East of Eden*, "I am in it and I don't for a moment pretend not to be" (*JN*, p. 24). For Steinbeck, being "in" his book meant that a whole vista of artistic freedoms had opened up. The technical license implicit in his bold departure also included his right to appropriate suitable materials from his readings. In his effort to fulfill the demanding obligations of *East of Eden's* epical design and subject, Steinbeck summoned a variety of literary and documentary sources which he employed to express his attitude toward characters, to discharge his thematic purpose and formal design, to provide realistic information, and to extend the novel's pietistic consequences.

Literary allusions and references clarify Steinbeck's method of characterization in *East of Eden*, and offer commentary on the direction and meaning of its plot. For example, Cathy Ames' entrance and exit in the novel are purposely associated with her reading of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, a work of fantasy which symbolizes her habits of secrecy, isolation, and escape into the fantasy of suicide (*EE*, p. 631). Joe Valery reads Harold Bell Wright's enormously popular melodrama, *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, his attention held by the novel's optimism (*EE*, p. 635). These examples of literary misprision underscore each character's distorted self-concept. In the same vein, Aron Trask's eventual demise is prefigured in his unexamined vision of university life, which he probably got "from the Doré illustrations of Dante's *Inferno* with its massed and radiant angels" (*EE*, pp. 598-599).

Steinbeck's allusive strategy also functions positively. The books associated with Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck's maternal grandfather, indicate depth of character, spiritual vitality and intellectual curiosity commensurate with his role as *East of Eden's* mythic hero. Besides his self-sufficiency and practical expertise, Samuel's uniqueness stems from his love of books and his ability to use them. "Then there were his education and his reading," Steinbeck writes, "the books he bought and borrowed, his knowledge of things that could not be eaten or worn or cohabited with, his interest in poetry and his respect for good writing" (*EE*, p. 44). Samuel pursues his reading with zeal, and, by borrowing books from his wealthy neighbors, "had read many more of the Delmars' books than the Delmars had" (*EE*, p. 44). Samuel's worldly poverty belies his imaginative wealth. His reading is even considered a dangerous and suspect act, but it is necessary for survival, because survival must be regarded as more than the ability to be financially successful.

Among the books Samuel owns, Steinbeck refers explicitly to *Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine*, William James' *Principles of*

*Psychology*, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, and the Bible. In a capacious sense, all four works minister to human survival. Each book speaks to a vital part of Samuel's temperament: Gunn for his body, James for his mind and senses, Marcus Aurelius for his moral and ethical will, and the Bible for his soul. Samuel, of all the characters, is best able to balance this quarternary confirmation. During the course of the novel, his assimilation of the precepts and knowledge contained in those works is transmitted to others. After Samuel dies (in Chapter 24) his presence is continued through the influence of his reading, and is commemorated through the legacy of his books-- a dual heritage Steinbeck was aware of when he told Covici, "we won't lose him" (*JN*, p. 117). After his death, however, Samuel's vision of the world (based on intellect, imagination and effective action) can no longer be *fully* assumed by any other single character, although Lee (the Trasks' Chinese servant) keeps the process of reading alive by adding to it in his own way, as does the narrator, who is the penultimate recipient of Samuel's beneficence.<sup>33</sup>

Samuel's use of "a great black book ... *Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine*" (*EE*, p. 12), especially its obstetrical information, later figures in his delivery of Cathy Trask's twins in Chapter 17. More importantly, however, the book is emblematic of his own family: "To look through *Dr. Gunn* is to know the Hamiltons' medical history," Steinbeck writes; and indeed the number of "bent and beat up" pages indicate its genuine importance for the physical survival of a rural household. William James' *Principles of Psychology* ("two volumes by a man the world is going to hear from") provides a key to Samuel's philosophical pluralism, the exceptional limberness of his mind, and the iconoclastic nature of many of his beliefs. That he must keep James' *Principles* hidden from Liza, his utterly practical wife, only emphasizes his attraction to forbidden knowledge. In fact, when Samuel counsels his son to read James, his suggestion is framed in the rhetoric of complicity, as though Samuel were committing a "crime" by introducing Joe to knowledge which "will raise up [his] lid a little" (*EE*, p. 216).

The most enduring legacy within the novel centers in Samuel's reading of the Bible. "'Give me a used Bible and I will, I think, be able to tell you about a man by the places that are edged with the dirt of seeking fingers'" (*EE*, p. 306). Samuel's knowledge of the Old Testament, especially his fascination with the Cain-Abel story in Genesis, literally provides him with names for the Trask twins, and helps establish a continuity between the Hamiltons and the Trasks. Symbolically, Samuel confers existence on Adam's children by granting them the gift of identity, for which survival becomes a choice:



"Caleb and Aron--now you are people and you have joined the fraternity and you have the right to be damned" (*EE*, p. 312).

Lee is Samuel's ally in intellectual matters, for he too understands the imperative necessity of reading. Lee shares Samuel's love for books and even dreams of owning a bookstore (*EE*, p. 191). He has, among the "thirty or forty" (*EE*, p. 217) books in his possession, the one-volume textbook version of James' *Psychology*. Lee's catholic taste allows him to approach the Bible as comparative mythology. Together, in Adam's presence, Lee and Samuel talk out the meaning of Genesis before the latter names the boys. It is Lee who understands the participatory dynamics of reading--"If a story is not about the hearer he will not listen" (*EE*, p. 310)--which aptly reflects Steinbeck's reflexive technique in *East of Eden*. Lee is also the one who rescues the Cain-Abel story from a strict parochial interpretation and places it in psychological perspective (epitomizing Steinbeck's approach), by calling it "the symbol story of the human soul," an "old and terrible story" important "because it is a chart of the soul" (*EE*, p. 310). Lee lacks Samuel's worldly experience and his capacity for action, yet he surpasses him in academic diligence, and this is sufficient to qualify him as Samuel's intellectual heir. The story of Cain and Abel "bit" so "deeply" into Lee that he studied it "'word for word'" (*EE*, p. 346). In his belief that *timshol* (Steinbeck spelled it *timshel*) means "Thou mayest" Lee discovers the sacred word which releases Samuel toward "an ending wonderful" (*EE*, p. 355), and finally allows Adam to bless Caleb, his wayward son (*EE*, p. 691), thereby completing the onomastic covenant which Samuel initiated earlier.

Still later, "consciously searching for some reassurance" (*EE*, p. 647) in a time of impending crisis for the Trasks, Lee reads passages from Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, which he had stolen from Samuel. As a whole, Marcus Aurelius' stoicism fits Lee's sensibility better than Samuel's. In this instance, however, its contents are less inspiring than Lee's intuition that Samuel would have understood his thievery: "Suddenly Lee felt good. He wondered whether Sam'l Hamilton had ever missed his book or known who stole it. It has seemed to Lee the only clean pure way was to steal it. He still felt good about it. His fingers caressed the smooth leather of the binding as he took it back and slipped it under the breadbox. He said to himself, 'But of course he knew who took it. Who else would have stolen Marcus Aurelius?'" (*EE*, p. 648).<sup>34</sup> The piety contained in Lee's ceremonial gesture enlarges the theme of legacy in *East of Eden*. In light of the importance which books and reading have in the novel, Lee's continuation of Samuel's intellectual tradition was as valuable to Steinbeck as the ethical and moral tradition embodied in the *timshol* doctrine.

And given Lee's awareness of the ironies apparent in the major monetary legacies--Adam "living all his life on stolen money," and Aron "living all his life on the profits from a whorehouse" (*EE*, p. 668)--Steinbeck implies that not only will a world without literature be a much diminished world, and survival a far more painful process, but also that a person can do worse than pilfer a book.

Steinbeck's background in reading helped focus *East of Eden's* technique. *Journal of a Novel* reveals his conscious awareness of other writers as a measure for Steinbeck's own novel and for his creative process. He invokes Twain and Whitman in his musing on the relationship between bodily comfort and writing conditions (*JN*, p. 6). Melville's *Moby-Dick* is offered as a comparison for the reception Steinbeck expects for *East of Eden* (*JN*, p. 29). In the same paragraph, he says "in pace [*East of Eden*] is much more like Fielding than Hemingway," an idea repeated later when he writes, "Its leisure derives from 18th-century novels, but it goes from that to the intense" (*JN*, p. 174). He also considered Sherwood Anderson and Cervantes inventors of the modern novel (*JN*, pp. 124, 179), and *The Book of the Dead* "as good and as highly developed as anything in the 20th century" (*JN*, p. 9). On 2 July 1951, a little more than halfway through his writing, he said, "I am not going to put artificial structures on this book. The real structures are enough, I mean the discipline imposed by realities and certain universal writers" (*JN*, p. 118).

Steinbeck has left some clues to those "universal writers." First and foremost, the story of Genesis provided not only the novel's title (*JN*, p. 104), but exerted a profound influence on the symbolic nature of *East of Eden*, especially its conceptual dualism. The verses of Cain and Abel, the myth of the Garden of Eden, and the eventual fall from grace provided the central, generative mythos. Around this "key to the story" (*JN*, p. 104), Steinbeck (influenced by Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion*) developed a contemporary perspective toward the dramatic, ethical, and psychological implications of the eternal contest between good and evil which dominates the novel. The imprint of Genesis pervades the theme and plot of *East of Eden*, figures prominently in Steinbeck's alignment of characters according to C-A initials (though this does not exclusively dictate their individual roles), and echoes in the rhythm of some of his prose. In his appropriation and transformation of *timshol*, Steinbeck found the ideogrammic lever to move the burden of the novel's moral weight. And though Steinbeck has been accused of translating *timshol* improperly (he uses *timshol* to mean "Thou mayest" rather than "Thou shalt") it should be remembered that Steinbeck was writing fiction, not scriptural hermeneutics (*JN*,

p. 109).<sup>35</sup> Given his invocation of Cervantes in the original dedication to *East of Eden* (*JN*, p. 179), and his explicit reference to Herodotus (*EE*, p. 475), Steinbeck's real consistency was his adherence to the artist's freedom to write in any manner he wished, which included his right to distort facts for artful purposes, as well as his propensity to reinvent the message of his literary precursors.

One of the most controversial questions raised by *East of Eden* concerns form and structure. For Steinbeck, who was not a sophisticated literary theorist, form was "organic" only in the sense that a single consciousness wrote through from beginning to middle to end.<sup>36</sup> What occurs in between was often subject to the artist's divination. In such a "unified field" theory of composition, even seemingly unrelated elements intersect and resonate with the main narrative. The intercalary chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the mobile form of *Cannery Row*, and later, *Sweet Thursday*, with its explicit chapters on "hooptedoodle," are all examples of this method. In *East of Eden* the editorial chapters create tonal variations for the narrative that support the dramatic, literary or historical thrust of the book, and keep alive the fictive voice of the narrator. Whatever corroboration for such "formless" form (*JN*, p. 112) Steinbeck found in fictional antecedents--*Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Moby Dick* (all works in which the teller is apparent in his tale)--his conception of morphology in *East of Eden* was also drawn from classical sources.

Early in *East of Eden* Steinbeck was already thinking of it as a "kind of parallel biography" (*JN*, p. 15), a term often applied to Plutarch's *Lives*. Like Plutarch, Steinbeck evinced an interest in the moral dimensions of individual characters, and employed a contrapuntal design to structure his book. In a sense, the Hamiltons can be considered Steinbeck's Greeks, the Trasks his Romans. Their "biographies," invested with exemplary stature, constitute his version of the decline of the mythic world and the birth of the mundane--an intention clarified in Steinbeck's comment of 2 July 1951, that Samuel's death marked the "end of an era" (*JN*, p. 117).

Steinbeck also referred to *East of Eden* as "history": "You will notice my methods of trying to create the illusion of something that really happened--in this book. I think it can properly be called not a novel but a history. And while its form is very tight, it is my intention to make it seem to have the formlessness of history. History is actually not formless but a long [view?] and a philosophic turn of mind are necessary to see its pattern. And I would like this to have that quality" (*JN*, p. 17). Steinbeck did not think of history in its modern, documentary sense; rather he thought of it the

way the Greeks often did, with emphasis on story, the encompassing idea of Logos which J.A.K. Thomson has developed and applied to Herodotus.<sup>37</sup> Under the rubric of Herodotus' cosmogonical intention, all the information he gathered about the known world was brought into play--a comprehensive spirit of inquiry echoed in Steinbeck's own belief that "the kind of book I am writing--should contain everything that seems to me to be true" (*JN*, p. 24). One of the main structural features of Herodotus' work is its use of digression, and one of its notable characteristics (frequently attacked by orthodox historians) is impressionism. To the degree that he also hypostatized the concepts of East and West, creating a conflict of moral, ethical and political order between which man must choose, Herodotus had not only a lasting formal impression on Steinbeck but a thematic one as well.

This two-fold emphasis is apparent in Chapter 34 of *East of Eden*. It is itself a digression from the main narrative. Steinbeck refers directly to the "Persian Wars" and selectively employs a truncated version of Croesus' decline and fall (told fully in Book One of Herodotus). Although Croesus was not burned to death "on a tall fire" (*EE*, p. 475), but was saved and honored by Cyrus, Steinbeck is chiefly concerned with what he considered the central aspect of Croesus' decline from favor. This was his eleventh hour recognition that Solon's wisdom had proven true: a man's life cannot be judged fortunate or unfortunate until after he has died.

Just as Steinbeck's interpretation of *timshol* grants man freedom of choice between good and evil, his interpretation of Croesus' situation further illuminates that major preoccupation, which the narrator couches in a contemporary mode: "It seems to me that if you or I must choose between two courses of thought and action, we should remember our dying and try so as to live that our death brings no pleasure to the world" (*EE*, p. 475). Steinbeck's focus is not only on the operation of good and evil in the universal world of political and economic reality, but also serves as the basis for his literary procedure. Like Herodotus, Steinbeck considered human action the nexus from which history-as-story was made, and he felt, too, that the art of the story teller cannot be separated from the tale itself.

The lineage of *East of Eden* also extends to Steinbeck's research and source material. Even though he transformed primary and literary materials with a certain amount of latitude, Steinbeck was nevertheless scrupulous about verifying basic facts. Several letters, written in 1948, testify to his distrust of "old timers" (*SLL*, p. 304), and his desire to make his material "right and correct" (*SLL*, p. 308). In

regard to concrete details about local history, political offices, and the cultural flavor of the Salinas area, Steinbeck originally planned to utilize back files of the *Salinas-Californian*, and wrote to its editor, Paul Caswell, of his intention on 2 January 1948 (*SLL*, p. 303). By the time Steinbeck wrote the novel three years later, he was out of touch with his native state, making his need for documentation especially acute. The plan to photocopy back issues of the newspaper was abandoned as excessively expensive and burdensome. Instead, Max Gordon, a staff reporter, agreed to answer Steinbeck's questions (nearly 200 of them) and supply pertinent data (Paul Caswell/Robert DeMott, Letter, 1 April 1979). Information about Adam Trask's lettuce shipping venture, and about wages and prices current at the turn of the century came to Steinbeck through Gordon's "legitimate research," which, Steinbeck told him, "can save me from considerable embarrassment."<sup>38</sup>

Steinbeck was not so scrupulous about crediting all of his sources, however. Although he "worked and studied and made research" (*JN*, p. 92) for the scene in Chapter 20 where Kate gains control of Faye, he still wondered if he had stolen the idea (*JN*, p. 93) and worried about being accused of plagiarism. Such confusion is obviously an occupational hazard for a writer, especially one who believed that literature is built on borrowing. Even where close parallels exist--as for instance between various aspects and passages of *East of Eden* and three books of widely divergent subject matter which he had encountered--the alchemical nature of his imagination exerted proprietary claims over his sources.

The three books that figured prominently in matters of characterization, theme and contemporary detail are Raoul Faure's novel, *Lady Godiva and Master Tom*, Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, and John Gunn's *New Family Physician*, already referred to earlier as *Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine*.<sup>39</sup> Faure's misogynic portrait of Lady Godiva as fickle, treacherous and sexually unfulfilled--Steinbeck judged it a "really blistering study of a woman" (*SLL*, p. 334)--aided his physical and psychological treatment of Cathy/Kate (also based on his ex-wife Gwyn) and probably inspired her identity as a "monster," though Steinbeck's utilization of that term goes far deeper than Faure's. *East of Eden's* thematic disposition, particularly Steinbeck's shift toward the primacy of individual psychology, was influenced by Fromm's "brilliant" monograph. Finally, Steinbeck made multiple use of Gunn's massive treatise. From its medical section, and from its lengthy, didactic prefatory section, Steinbeck drew information to substantiate his portrayal of nineteenth-century medical knowledge, obstetrical procedures, physiological, emotional and mental states, as well as other thematic and conceptual elements which comple-

mented the ethical and moral posture of his novel.

Since Gunn's book is so deeply embedded in *East of Eden*, the following discussion, which covers only a portion of its influence, should prove helpful.<sup>40</sup> At the most elementary level, Steinbeck depended on Gunn for specific contemporary medical information which added verisimilitude to his rendering of nineteenth-century life. In most of these cases Steinbeck followed Gunn's material faithfully. Alice, the young girl who becomes Cyrus Trask's second wife (his first wife and mother of his son, Adam, had committed suicide), "knew perfectly well that she had what was called consumption" (*EE*, p. 20). Gunn's section on Consumption (*NFP*, p. 271) provided Steinbeck with the symptomatic deep cough, perspiration, and flushed cheeks he used to describe Alice's disease (*EE*, pp. 20, 37).

Steinbeck used Gunn's information on pregnancy and midwifery, especially for medical lore and common sense knowledge current during the last century. For details to substantiate his account of Cathy Trask's delivery (*EE*, Chapter 17), Steinbeck followed the Fifth Division of Gunn's treatise--"Diseases of Women." Steinbeck's comment that a "woman gave a tooth for a child" (*EE*, p. 212), was suggested by Gunn's description of "the Toothache, so often complained of by pregnant women," and his recommendation that the tooth "ought not to be drawn during Pregnancy unless urgently required" (*NFP*, p. 542). Cathy's "strange taste" for the carpenter's chalk (*EE*, pp. 212-213) is indebted to Gunn's statement about "Green Sickness," which causes an "unnatural craving" for "clay, chalk, and the like" (*NFP*, p. 546). When Samuel is summoned to attend Cathy's delivery, he cautions Lee and Adam to be patient (*EE*, pp. 216, 220). Gunn says, "But in every instance, let me impress on your mind *patience*; and let Nature alone, for she will accomplish the labor" (*NFP*, p. 526). Despite the ease of Cathy's deliveries, Samuel's presence is necessary to advance the novel's dramatic action. When Samuel returns home with fever and illness brought on by the vicious bite Cathy inflicts on his hand, Steinbeck marshalls a subtly humorous counter-weight to the grim scene, as well as an acknowledgement of a folk cure corroborated by Gunn:

Hence, Soups, Broths and nutritious Teas will constitute a large proportion of the proper diet for the sick. Chicken Soup is one of the most common as well as most useful and beneficial kinds of Soup. (*NFP*, p. 970)

And Tom brought [Samuel] chicken soup until he wanted to kill him. The lore had not died out of the world, and you still find people who believe that soup will cure any hurt or illness... (*EE*, p. 228)

The most numerous borrowings from Gunn are associated with details which amplified characterization, or which set the stage for dramatic episodes. Steinbeck ranged freely through Gunn's book, picking and choosing elements which either enriched his notion of a character's personality, or confirmed his intuition toward that character's role. Besides Gunn's account of the tranquil mind (*NFP*, pp. 91-92), Steinbeck found other clues for his characterization of Samuel. The following quotations were written on 20 February 1951, shortly after Steinbeck began *East of Eden*. The borrowing indicates that Steinbeck was already employing Gunn's book to augment his own admittedly "hazy" recollections (*EE*, p. 9) of the Hamiltons (see also *JN*, p. 63). Samuel is one of Steinbeck's purest heroes, so it is fitting that his noble attributes are consistently supported with material from Gunn that manifest innate efficacy. Gunn's belief in the vital conjunction between "virtuous regulation of the moral feelings, and the health of the body" (*NFP*, p. 98), found expression in Steinbeck's appraisal of Samuel: "And just as there was a cleanness about his body, so there was a cleanness in his thinking. Men coming to his blacksmith shop to talk and to listen dropped their cursing for a while, not from any kind of restraint but automatically, as though this were not the place for it" (*EE*, p. 12). Again, from a section on Management of Children (*NFP*, p. 630), Steinbeck employed Gunn's observations to symbolize the effects of Samuel's voice-- a distinctive feature of his appeal and his uniqueness (*EE*, p. 12).

With nearly everything he appropriated from Gunn, Steinbeck reshaped the original (by compression or expansion), avoided Gunn's sentimental language and rhetorical flourishes, and extracted the spirit of Gunn's passage to fit his conception of characterization. The limberness of Steinbeck's fictive imagination, his need to seek out the implications otherwise buried in declarative details, is evident in his transformation of Gunn's pedestrian account on Melancholy. Steinbeck's covenant is with the language of fiction, and toward that end he re-ordered Gunn's material into the imagistic diction and crisp vernacular associated with his best writing. In Gunn's catalogue of mental disaffection, Steinbeck saw the potential for a devastating portrait of Cyrus Trask's first wife, whose psychological quirks and aberrant religiosity eventually destroy her:

Melancholy is a purely mental disease.... The patient shuns society and seeks to be alone; is low-spirited, fretful, suspicious and inquisitive; has a distaste for everything.... Indeed, the disease can often be traced to some sudden misfortune as the cause, such as

the death of a friend, or member of the family, disappointed affection, matrimonial difficulty.... So tormenting are these imaginary fears sometimes, that the unfortunate sufferer seeks every opportunity to end his troubles by self-destruction, or suicide. (*NFP*, pp. 383-384)

Mrs. Trask was a pale, inside-herself woman. No heat of the sun ever reddened her cheeks, and no open laughter raised the corners of her mouth. She used religion as a therapy for the ills of the world and of herself, and she changed the religion to fit the ill.... Her search was quickly rewarded by the infection [gonorrhea] Cyrus brought home from the war.... Her god of communication became a god of vengeance.... It was quite easy for her to attribute her condition to certain dreams she had experienced while her husband was away. But the disease was not punishment enough for her nocturnal philandering. Her new god ... demanded of her a sacrifice. She searched her mind for some proper egotistical humility and almost happily arrived at the sacrifice--herself. (*EE*, pp. 16-17)

Finally, there is also a shared spiritual positivism between Steinbeck's belief (suggested by William Faulkner's Nobel Prize address in 1950) in the writer's "duty" to "lift up, to extend, to encourage" (*JN*, p. 115), and Gunn's declamation that "Progress in moral and intellectual excellence is our duty, our honor, and our interest" (*NFP*, p. 12). However, where Gunn looks to God as the final solution of man's dilemma, Steinbeck considers the field of human activity, especially the nature of good and evil, to be the province of the writer:

Thanks be unto God, where good is brought into operation, the evil must wear out, but the good never. If goodness, that is, the obedience of faith, working by love, were not omnipotent, society would never be improved--for propensity to sin, or to act from selfish impulse alone, is psychologically proved to be unavoidable and irresistible, unless the spirit of holiness be imparted. But experience also demonstrates that immorality does not necessary continue; the entrance of true light, through the mercy and goodness of God, gives new power and direction to the soul.... (*NFP*, pp. 589-590)

We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is



venerable as nothing else in this world is. (*EE*, p. 477)

This is the point where Gunn and Steinbeck part company, one returning to "the gem Religion!" (*NFP*, p. 13), the other embracing the "miracle of creation"--"the preciousness" in "the lonely mind of man" (*EE*, p. 151).

Steinbeck's use of Gunn brings us back to his belief in the efficacy of books. Gunn's volume actually belonged to Samuel Hamilton, and in the original manuscript of *East of Eden*, Steinbeck claimed, "I have it still,"<sup>41</sup> In fact, Samuel's copy had been dispersed, though Steinbeck vividly remembered its presence, suggesting that he had once memorized it, taken notes on it, or had a similar copy available in 1951. In the immediacy of his compositional process, Steinbeck's imagination embraced Gunn's book as a talisman which symbolized a legitimate connection with his family's capacity for survival and his grandfather's most memorable attributes--his love of books and reading. In this way, Samuel functioned as a spiritual and intellectual guide, both for Steinbeck the fictional narrator, and for Steinbeck the man and father. In turn, Steinbeck perpetuated the family's creative legacy of reading by initially addressing his novel as a sort of manner book, or guide to ethical and moral deportment (*JN*, p. 40), to his own children, for whom he hoped it would also provide a "background in the world of literature" (*JN*, p. 4), and thereby continue the legacy of participation into yet another generation.

### III. The Last Two Decades

"Mr. Steinbeck read widely," Elizabeth Otis recalled, and while at any given time his "favorite" reading could range from dictionaries (especially the *OED*, which he considered "the greatest book in the world") and reference works to classic literature, "it spread out every which way from there" (Elizabeth Otis/Robert DeMott, Letter, 25 February 1979). The spread of Steinbeck's reading during the final epoch of his life was exceptionally wide and deep, but it was also marked by uncertainties and reservations, as well as seductions and dead-ends (the latter chiefly in regard to his work on the Arthurian legend which I will examine shortly). At times during this era his reading paralleled the erratic shape of his writing career, and reflected his movement toward resuscitating a personal brand of romanticism. After failing to complete his modern rendition of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, a project which detained him for several years, Steinbeck found a way to achieve an imaginative resolution about his reading of *The Winter of Our Discontent* and an imperative one in *America and*

*Americans*. By the 1960s Steinbeck's artistic powers had clearly waned (in 1967 he admitted to Elizabeth Otis that he had been "worked out" for a long time); and although neither book is vintage Steinbeck, for the purpose of articulating his nostalgic and reflective judgments on the significance of reading, they are important and worth returning to.

Before arriving there, however, it is necessary to indicate the kinds of reading and writing which occupied Steinbeck's attention in the 1950s and 1960s. Naturally he kept up his interest in classic writers--Homer, Herodotus, Plutarch, Thucydides, Marcus Aurelius, Petrarch, Malory, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Voltaire, Cellini, Rousseau, and Smollett all earned his praise for their ability to remain fresh, exciting and instructive. Since his "discovery" of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1945, and its subsequent technical impact on *East of Eden*, that wonderful shape-shifting book remained one of Steinbeck's literary touchstones through the 1950s, until its presence was largely effaced by his involvement with Sir Thomas Malory. Indeed, Steinbeck was so impressed by Cervantes' achievements as a writer (not only in *Don Quixote* but later in the *Exemplary Novels* as well), and was so moved by Cervantes' experience as a prisoner (part of Steinbeck's intense attraction to Malory stemmed from similar impulses) that in 1954 he talked of travelling to La Mancha to chronicle "all of the places Cervantes wrote about" in preparation for a book he planned to write "that parallels *Don Quixote*."<sup>42</sup>

Like several other projects during these years, that "written and photographed" account never materialized. Yet Steinbeck's habit of utilizing his favorite reading remained consistent, if somewhat refracted and deferred. The spirit of Steinbeck's proposed quest later informed his cross-country American odyssey in *Travels With Charley*, a "Project Windmills" carried out with his poodle, Charley (a diminutive Sancho Panza), in a pickup truck/camper named "Rocinante" in homage to the Don's horse. This is admittedly a kind of honorific connection, and another of Steinbeck's exercises in literary play. But the deliberate burlesque should not mask his deeper attraction to Cervantes' book, which was both a criticism of formulaic Romance and a celebration of its individual spirit. For all of its realistic contemporary focus, its exposure of the synthetic face of American experience, *Travels With Charley* is also embedded in the personal, romantic values of nostalgia, introspection and process which Steinbeck held increasingly dear in the second half of his career.<sup>43</sup>

Besides Cervantes and the other authors mentioned or quoted from in *Travels* (he took 150 pounds of books on the trip), including Thomas Wolfe, C.E.S. Wood, Sinclair Lewis and William Shirer, Steinbeck also invoked Herodotus, Marco

Polo and Sir John Mandeville to lend a fabulous air to his journey. "I am happy to report," he wrote after passing through Fargo, North Dakota, "that in the war between reality and romance, reality is not the stronger" (*TWC*, p. 134). In the pressing matter of introducing himself to his readers—who are "more interested in what I wear than what I think, more avid to know how I do it than in what I do"—Steinbeck borrowed a convention from the "Master" Joseph Addison by opening *Travels With Charley* with his own digressive "History" (*TWC*, pp. 38-39). And from Elaine Steinbeck's reference to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels With a Donkey*, Steinbeck discovered his title (*SLL*, p. 676).

The duality Steinbeck uncovered in his "wandering narrative" is an apt metaphor for his reading experiences during this period of his life. From the early 1950s until the late 1960s he discovered some new reading interests and intellectual vistas, but they were not always as satisfying or as lasting as his experiences with the traditional writers. His friendship with Edward Albee drew out his curiosity about Absurdist drama, and his natural tendency to identify with the dispossessed found a practical outlet in his support of Budd Schulberg's Watts Writers' Workshop and its first publication, *From the Ashes*. He also kept abreast of current trends in prose and followed *Paris Review*, *Publishers Weekly* and *Saturday Review*. He praised John O'Hara's *From the Terrace*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Barnaby Conrad's *The Matador*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Denis Murphy's *The Sergeant* and Frank Conroy's autobiographical *Stop-Time*, but he could never finish Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, and he remained puzzled by the "despairing brilliance" of J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*. Even three established voices in American fiction struck leaden chords with him: Katherine Anne Porter's *The Ship of Fools* seemed "removed from reality"; Mary McCarthy's *The Group* was "duller than ditch-water" and Thornton Wilder's *The Eighth Day* he judged "tedious." At various times in his last years Steinbeck read with "interest and admiration" fiction as diverse as Phillip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*, J.F. Powers' *Morte D'Urban*, William Faulkner's *The Reivers*, John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and *The Centaur*, and Truman Capote's "non-fiction" novel *In Cold Blood*, but he realized that his "eye for fiction [had] changed its focus" (*LTE*, p. 106). He seemed increasingly content to look to the past for substantive enrichment. In 1962, for example, making yet another journey through the *Peloponnesian Wars*, he told Elizabeth Otis, "One of the nice things about this time is the re-reading of old things and the re-evaluating. Some things I admired have fallen off but others have become far greater ... Thucydides has gone up. They haven't changed—I have."<sup>44</sup>

That change in temperament and vision had been coming for

several years. After his fortuitous marriage to Elaine Scott in 1950, Steinbeck began to assemble a working library, a "staunch bastion" comprised mainly of books on words and a large selection of reference works to replace what he had lost after his divorce from Gwyn, and to satisfy his renewed passion for words. "The crazy thing about all this," he informed Carlton Sheffield in 1952, "is that I don't use a great variety of words in my work at all. I just love them for themselves" (*SLL*, p. 457). His statement emphasizes the pleasures of reading and research, and indicates an indulgent preference for the process of study rather than its eventual product. Indeed, within a few years, it was not just books on words and the American language that captivated Steinbeck's attention, but a nearly obsessive commitment to expanding his library with everything he could get his hands on that dealt with Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. By the late 1950s Steinbeck had accumulated a first-rate library on the subject and a scholar's knowledge of the field, but had only managed an incomplete translation of Malory's great book into modern American.

In fact, after the burst of creativity which had resulted in "About Ed Ricketts," *Burning Bright*, *Viva Zapata!* and *East of Eden* between 1950 and 1952, Steinbeck published little else of enduring value until the 1960s. Viking Press did bring out two novels, both of them minor. *Sweet Thursday* (1954), was a slight effort, a sentimental return to Cannery Row and the figure of Doc, interesting mostly for Steinbeck's obviously self-reflexive attention to the theme of abortive inspiration and blocked creativity. *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* (1957), whose "spiritual father" was Voltaire's *Candide* (but which lacked its bite), ranks as Steinbeck's weakest novel.

Many of his other publications in the 1950s--and there were plenty of them--can be classed as journalism. There were frequent appearances as a contributor to *Saturday Review*, travel essays and political dispatches commissioned for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and a collection of occasional prose pieces, *Un Américain à New York et à Paris*, published in a limited edition in Paris in 1956.<sup>45</sup> One of his short stories, "How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank" (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1956), became a partial basis for *The Winter of Our Discontent*, while the earlier Poesque "The Affair at 7, rue de M--" (*Harper's Bazaar*, 1955) was incorporated in the first posthumous edition of the *Viking Portable Steinbeck* (1971). For the most part, Steinbeck's publications between 1953 and 1959 were routine efforts, interesting for their social commentary and useful for charting his individualism, but generally uninspired, even pedestrian.

It was also a time of false starts and unrealized dreams. Besides the Cervantes project and one on Christopher Columbus

(*SLL*, p. 476), he also abandoned a proposed (and partly researched) book on the Caribbean when he read Alec Waugh's *Island in the Sun*. "If I did not know about this book," he told Elizabeth Otis, "it would be all right because it is not likely that we could write exactly the same kind of account. But the fact that I do know about it before my own work is completed puts an entirely new face on the matter. I will have to abandon my plans" (*LTE*, p. 61). His disappointment was almost a harbinger of his next three years' work.

And yet to say that Steinbeck *accomplished* little else during this period is not accurate either, for one of those unfinished dreams called for an effort as monumental and single-minded as Steinbeck ever undertook. As a reader, Steinbeck's engagement with the research and acquisition of books necessary to prepare his translation of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* was unprecedented, approached only by his Phalanx reading in the 1930s; as an artist, however, the Arthurian research bore fruits of a different kind. Like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, Steinbeck conceived *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* as another of his "big" books, the capstone of a lifetime of devoted building. The trouble, he said, was his "ignorance" about the subject, which compelled him to "know everything ... about what Malory knew and how he might have felt" (*ACTS*, p. 316).

In the years from 1956 to 1959, when he was researching, then writing, his modern rendition of the *Morte*, Steinbeck consumed "hundreds" of books and documents related to the history, language and literature of Malory's fifteenth century and its parallels in the twentieth century (*ACTS*, p. 317). Along with the major literary sources and antecedents of Malory's book, Steinbeck scoured "the scholarly diggings and scabbings," not only of "Chambers, Sommer, Gollancz, Saintsbury" (*ACTS*, p. xii), but also of Rhys, Hicks, Kittredge, Vinaver, Newstead and a host of others. He branched out from there in every direction by reading as far back and in as many areas as possible. "Since Christmas I have been reading, reading, reading and it has been delightful, like remembered music," he told Pascal Covici on 7 January 1957. "I've been back into Gildas and into the Anglo Saxon Chronicle, into Bede, and back into histories of Roman Britain and Saxon Britain and into the whole field of [Greek, Buddhist and Jungian myth] ... and into the twelfth and thirteenth and fourteenth century in England" (*S&C*, p. 198).

Much of his study would not have been possible without the advice and assistance of Chase Horton, Manager of the Washington Square Book Store in New York City. Like Ed Ricketts years earlier and Eugène Vinaver a little later, Horton served as an enthusiastic guide through the forest of scholarship

and bibliography. Horton not only supplied Steinbeck with books, both here and abroad, but sometimes, as with Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and Ivan Margary's *Roman Roads in Britain*, marked out key passages ahead of time to make sure Steinbeck did not miss them.<sup>46</sup> But Steinbeck's passion for the quest was so strong that he did his part zealously. For the first time in his life, Steinbeck began to take real pleasure in the physical appearance of books (especially Iris Origo's *The Merchant of Prato* and Armando Sapori's *Merchants and Companies in Ancient Florence*). "We are going to have a rather formidable library before we are finished," he wrote Elizabeth Otis on 19 April 1957, "and I couldn't be happier about this" (*ACTS*, p. 303). Throughout this period he continued to read avidly on his own (in one brief stretch, despite his admittedly slow reading pace, he managed to devour six books by C.G. Coulton and three by James Hamilton Wylie), as well as in the Pierpont Morgan Library and in what he thought would be the untapped resources of libraries in Florence and Rome.<sup>47</sup>

After six months of research, which began in November, 1956, Steinbeck lost the thread of his design. Then, almost miraculously, he discovered it again one morning in Rome in late April of 1957. His major breakthrough, a "dizzying inductive leap," which he hoped would cancel all the scholarly "inconsistencies and absurdities," centered on a twin recognition: first, that the *Morte* should be considered "the first and one of the greatest novels in the English language"; and second, that Malory should be considered essentially a romantic novelist, "a rearranger of nature," who makes "an understandable pattern" (*ACTS*, pp. 304-305). This insight granted Steinbeck a great deal of freedom and latitude in his treatment, for it brought Malory and the *Morte* into a recognizable fictive realm, an arena where Steinbeck initially felt comfortable.

However, it also led to a major aesthetic dilemma he never solved. The novelist's "self-character"--the "one chief or central character in the novel" invested with the writer's own virtues and faults--cannot conclusively "win" the Quest for the Grail. For Malory, whose self character was Lancelot, this meant that Lancelot could not achieve the Grail, but his son Galahad could because only he was "unsoiled" and pure enough. For Steinbeck, whose self character was a combination of both Malory and Lancelot, this configuration led to a cruel irony.<sup>48</sup> Although at the time he was encouraged by his belief that the "Malory-Lancelot" double could indirectly fulfill the Quest, it soon became apparent that in Steinbeck's hands the quest could never be finished, and his Grail (in this case the finished book) could never be attained. Perhaps Steinbeck, who habitually feared ending a book as much as he hated beginning one, allowed himself to be swayed by an immediate conviction--that the

achievement of perfection he sought could be sublimated to the process of the creative quest.<sup>49</sup> The book, he reminded Elizabeth Otis earlier, "is much more Acts than Morte" (*ACTS*, p. 298).

Steinbeck was so fired with justifying his fabular approach (a line-by-line collation of Eugène Vinaver's Winchester text of the *Morte* with Steinbeck's *Acts* shows the novelist's emphasis on mythic continuity, symbolism and psychological motivation), that he eventually became intimidated by the "endless subject."<sup>50</sup> The pressure to transform a legend which had persisted in his imagination since childhood (he discovered the Caxton version of Malory's *Morte* when he was nine) led Steinbeck into so much primary and secondary research that he never recovered the creative balance between appropriation and invention necessary to complete his task. The competitive urge to prove himself worthy in a traditional literary and historical area turned rather quickly from aggression toward the "frightened" scholars, to a genuine admiration for their work: "I'm having a hell of a fine time with the books," he reported to Chase Horton at a period when he was "staying away from Malory" (*ACTS*, p. 311). For one of the few times in his career (the other notable instance occurred when he was researching Joan of Arc in the mid-1940s), the seductive pleasures of his study preempted his writing: "I have read until I am blind with reading," he confessed to Eugène Vinaver in 1958 (*SLL*, p. 578).<sup>51</sup>

Steinbeck's admission can be considered unintentionally prophetic. Despite a year of concentrated writing at Discover Cottage, Somerset, England, in 1958-1959, and the unflagging encouragement of Elaine Steinbeck, Chase Horton and Eugène Vinaver (enthusiasm, however, not fully joined by Otis and Covici, who both doubted the commercial value of his venture and preferred that Steinbeck produce something like T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, or fluff like *Camelot*), Steinbeck never finished his fictionalization. *The Acts of King Arthur* was posthumously published in 1976, and minus one section, appeared in virtually the same textual state as Steinbeck had left it.<sup>52</sup> At 293 pages it represents a small percentage of Malory's original, but what Steinbeck did achieve in that space is of very high order. Earlier Eugène Vinaver praised the drafts he had seen as "the best thing of its kind written in English since the fifteenth century"; and when the book finally appeared, John Gardner called it an "impressive work of art."<sup>53</sup> If his struggle with "The Winchester Manuscripts of Sir Thomas Malory and Other Sources" ended in personal frustration and disappointment for Steinbeck, it was not because of the quality of his work, nor the depth of his understanding of the material, but because the subject proved to be far more vast, complicated and demanding than he had anticipated. Ironi-

cally, in refusing to write the "popular" book which Otis and Covici wanted, and holding out for a "permanent" one instead (*ACTS*, p. 343), he was stymied by his own passionate pursuit of knowledge and his own scrupulous standards of novelistic conduct.

In several important ways, however, Steinbeck's research was not wasted, only deferred. After abandoning *The Acts of King Arthur* in 1959, Steinbeck was frequently assailed by fears of his decline as a writer. In the summer of 1960, when he was writing *The Winter of Our Discontent* (and already planning the American journey which would eventuate in *Travels with Charley*), he spoke of the necessity to "save [his] life and the integrity of [his] creative pulse" (*SLL*, p. 669). Through symbolic transference, Steinbeck's pressing need for artistic salvation influenced *Winter's* survival quotient. And by once again elevating the act of reading to a generative function he found a way to redeem his failure with the Arthurian book and (even though there is nothing overtly Arthurian in the novel) to transmute some of his acquired knowledge into the elements of fiction. His anecdotal story, "How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank," suggests one of the possible directions *The Winter of Our Discontent* might have taken, but it will simply not explain what Steinbeck created in the novel; in the years between 1956 and 1960 his experience in reading intervened in such a way as to make all the difference in execution, theme and resolution.

Like *East of Eden*, *The Winter of Our Discontent* is an intensely personal novel. Although few critics agree on the quality of Steinbeck's achievements in *Winter*, none dispute its indebtedness to a variety of sources. Besides Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which supplied his title, Steinbeck ransacked the New Testament Gospels (especially Matthew and Luke), Caedmon's *Genesis*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Henry Clay's speeches, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and John Elov Boodin's *A Realistic Universe* for everything from thematic and structural parallels, symbolism, imagery and elements of characterization, to dialogue, stylistic echoes and direct quotations.<sup>54</sup> As usual, he handled these materials with a mixture of scrupulous integrity, dramatic irony and cavalier impressionism. Despite their striking differences, however, nearly all of these sources (and his reading in myth) contributed to Steinbeck's awareness that the only worthwhile subject for a writer in any age is the dilemma of individual conscience, human suffering and existential choice--an awareness, moreover, which underlies the thorny plight of Ethan Allen



Hawley, the novel's protagonist and narrator. If the disjointedness of these sources argues for a patchwork job rather than a seamless construction, it should be remembered that Steinbeck utilized them purposely to reflect Hawley's divided sensibility, not his own. *Winter*, he informed the Loessers on 25 May 1960, is "part Kafka and part Booth Tarkington" (*SLL*, p. 666), which is to say, it is part surrealistic nightmare, part social commentary.

The division in Hawley's mind between social and individual propriety overarches the entire novel. The Tarkingtonian aspect of *Winter* is associated with the social value system of New Baytown (and by extension, all of America) which, as it enters a sophisticated technological age, Steinbeck criticizes for its moral and spiritual backsliding, its neglect of traditional mores and nurturing human choices.<sup>55</sup> This realistic social dimension, characterized by epochal changes in humanity's attitude toward corruption, greed and hypocrisy, occasions the novel's plot and supplies its external action.

Steinbeck's reference to Kafka provides a path to a lower level of engagement and suggests a key to Hawley's split sensibility. Large sections of *The Winter of Our Discontent* are devoted to Hawley's explorations of his own interior distances. He is fascinated with his "night thoughts" and the compelling (and often confusing and contradictory) force of his own mental and emotional processes. His self-revelatory accounts are tinged with surrealism, and furthermore, they are organized to produce significant metamorphoses in his psyche and character. "It's as though, in the dark and desolate caves of the mind, a faceless jury had met and decided" (*WOD*, p. 92) the direction his life should take; in doing so, that "Congress in the Dark" supported his contention that "a man is changing all the time" (*WOD*, p. 93), though not necessarily for the better.

Hawley witnesses moral decline everywhere around him and decides to get his piece of the action by engaging in dishonest machinations. Unlike Mr. Hogan in Steinbeck's story, Hawley's plans to rob the New Baytown bank are scotched, but not before he has gained possession of Marullo's store (where he works as a clerk) and the rights to valuable land (formerly owned by his childhood friend, Danny Taylor) that will be the site for New Baytown's airport. The verdict of his inner voices justifies Hawley's ignoble decision to abnegate his "normal" past, which he now considers a "failure," to turn his back on "habits and attitudes" which he used to consider "moral, even virtuous" (*WOD*, p. 94), and, through chicanery and deceit, to pursue a course of financial and personal aggrandizement: "Once I perceived the pattern and accepted it, the path was clearly marked and the dangers apparent. What amazed me most was that it seemed to plan itself; one thing grew out of

another and everything fitted together. I watched it grow and only guided it with the lightest touch" (*WOD*, p. 201). In Hawley's temporary abdication of free will to justify his villainous plan, Steinbeck is clearly distancing himself from his narrator, and is using him instead as a representative vehicle for the self-induced follies of his age.

Steinbeck's separation from Hawley's amorality does not mean a complete dissociation from all facets of his narrator's character, however. In fact, Hawley serves the same function Steinbeck had earlier conceived for Malory and Lancelot; that is, Hawley is Steinbeck's "self-character." If Hawley is at times treacherous, hypocritical and supercilious, he is also reflective, inquisitive and perceptive. In some interpretive aspects of his voice, opinions and habits of mind are closely linked to Steinbeck's:

I guess we're all, or most of us, the wards of that nineteenth-century science which denied existence to anything it could not measure or explain. The things we couldn't explain went right on but surely not with our blessing. We did not see what we couldn't explain, and meanwhile a great part of the world was abandoned to children, insane people, fools, and mystics, who were more interested in what is than in why it is. So many old and lovely things are stored in the world's attic, because we don't want them around us and we don't dare throw them out. (*WOD*, p. 75)

What Steinbeck refused to throw out of his novel was the entire realm of myth, which had been the major by-product of his Arthurian studies. His immersion in Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Jessie Weston, Robert Graves, Stith Thompson and others exerted a profound influence on *Winter's* tone and atmosphere. His reading confirmed Steinbeck's insistent belief in the synchronism of psychological processes, and the continuity of mythic and symbolic forms of action.

As his earliest fiction shows, Steinbeck had always believed that "the body of myth ... changed very little in its essence" from generation to generation (*ACTS*, p. 316), but in the period from 1956 to 1960, the individual ramifications of that awareness came back to him with special force and reaffirmation of purpose.<sup>56</sup> Besides supplying his collateral concern with witchcraft, folklore and superstition, the body of myth formed the novel's essential emphasis on archetypes, including light/dark imagery, water symbolism, withdrawal/return patterns, and totemic icons, especially Margie Young-Hunt's Tarot cards and the Hawley family talisman, a "strange and magic" translucent stone, brought back from China by his ancestors (*WOD*, p. 135). Jungian

psychology once again evoked the mysteries of the unconscious mind, that "secret and sleepless ... spawning place" (WOD, p. 92) deep inside Hawley, and also suggested symbols to fulfill his narrator's predilection for hidden recesses, such as his private "Place" on Old Harbor where he retreats to atavistic security (WOD, p. 283). The continuous, "durational" feeling of myth (ACTS, p. 326) which Steinbeck wished to achieve in his treatment of *Morte* carried over to *Winter* and tempered its contemporary realism, linked it to the remote past and to the world of Hawley's ancestors (especially his Great Aunt Deborah, a woman of "curiosity and knowledge" who dove deeply "into books"), and conditioned Hawley's romantic preoccupations with the nether world, the "uncharted country" of dreams, the felt world of visitations. "Like most modern people," he says, "I don't believe in prophecy or magic and then spend half my time practicing it." In a sense, then, like Joseph Wayne in *To a God Unknown*, the Harvard educated Hawley stands figuratively between ancient and modern values, pagan and learned knowledge. If he is hampered by his age's moral relativity and his own debilitating and Puritanical self-scrutiny, his courageous refusal to be sacrificed is rooted in an older monomyth--the secular hero's return from the dark underworld toward the living light, a pattern Hawley specifically enacts when he leaves his secret Place for the last time. Moreover, as Steinbeck's self-character, Hawley is not pure enough to complete this wayward version of the Grail quest for himself. He can, however, turn his weaknesses to strengths by utilizing his knowledge of the quest's process to insure its survival in Ellen, one of his children, the new "owner" of the Hawley talisman, the new bearer of the family "light" (WOD, p. 298).<sup>57</sup>

Ever since his original experiments with the parable form in *The Pearl* fifteen years earlier, Steinbeck had moved toward a poetic mode which would allow apprehension of, and participation in, the wondrous quality of experience. "A story must have some points of contact with the reader to make him feel at home in it," Hawley says. "Only then," he continues, "can he accept wonders" (WOD, p. 75). In *Winter*, an essential approach to the numinous--and indeed the whole evanescent tradition which "light" signifies--is conveyed through the presence of books and the efficacy of knowledge. Steinbeck's recent period of intensive research awakened his fascination for what, by 1960, must have seemed a fairly inscrutable bond between the act of reading and the formation of consciousness. This attitude, which was partly compensatory and partly celebratory, led to one of the most resonant passages in Steinbeck's fiction, Ethan Allen Hawley's attic reverie. In the attic of Hawley's ancestral home, the books, which represent the cumulative intellectual heritage of his family, "sit ... waiting to be redis-

covered." Hawley recollects "scrambling among the brilliants of books"--not only the ringing political speeches of Lincoln, Webster and Clay, and the intensely expressive writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman mentioned earlier (*WOD*, p. 32)--but these other titles,

tinted with light, the picture books of children grown, seeded, and gone; *Chatterboxes* and the Rollo series; a thousand acts of God--*Fire, Flood, Tidal Waves, Earthquakes*--all fully illustrated; the Gustave Doré Hell, with Dante's squared cantos like bricks between; and the heartbreaking stories of Hans Christian Andersen, the blood-chilling violence and cruelty of the Grimm Brothers, the Morte d'Arthur of majesty with drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, a sickly, warped creature, a strange choice to illustrate great, manly Malory. (*WOD*, pp. 74-75)

Taken in its entirety, this scene serves a utilitarian function because it illuminates the dichotomy in Hawley's mind between the demands of practicality and the desire for nostalgia and permanence which defines his particular stance throughout the novel. By evoking a living tradition centered in books, Steinbeck simultaneously deepens the pathos of Hawley's present amorality, and foreshadows the entire tradition of consciousness which will survive when Hawley decides not to kill himself at the end of the novel.

Viewed in a wider perspective, this passage can be considered Steinbeck's testimony to the generative and curative power of books, a kind of apologia for a lifetime of reading. Like his protagonist, held back from fulfilling his desire by rationalization and self-created obstacles, Steinbeck turned the process of searching into a redemptive gesture, a symbolic statement that such knowledge need not be lost or consigned solely to the past. In the sense that Ethan Allen Hawley is temporarily seduced by the lure of popular morality and meretricious alternatives (and by the debasement of language which accompanies such choices), Steinbeck dramatized his own perilous artistic condition (*SLL*, p. 653). Just when the situation seemed bleakest, however, he turned apparent failure into creative affirmation by joining the investiture of myth with the permanence of intellectual tradition.

In these uncorrupted moments of perception, then, the act of reading became a kind of moral imperative for Steinbeck because it engendered understanding, insight, critical awareness, compassion and continuity; in short, the best qualities any human being could aspire to. Given the depth of Steinbeck's commitment to the cause of intellectual and creative sanctity, it is a short but direct route from the private reverberations of *The Winter of Our Discontent* to the public pronouncements

of *America and Americans*, the last book published in his lifetime, and the final avatar of his theme.

In his chapter on literature, "Americans and the World," Steinbeck constructed a version of American literature's "two-fold" growth, and emphasized the necessity of reading our best native literature, even though it is "no more flattering than Isaiah was about the Jews, Thucydides about the Greeks, or Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal about the Romans" (A&A, p. 162). Like most writer's accounts, his survey of American letters is both selective (he does not mention Hawthorne and James) and impressionistic (his knowledge of Cooper and Stephen Crane is imperfect).

But Steinbeck was not speaking in the voice of an authoritative scholar about his subject. Rather, he adopted the voice and point of view of an artistic communicant, a believer in the ontological benefits of reading fiction. He speaks here as an advocate, a passionate participant in a radical literary tradition whose objectives he fundamentally adopted, just as he frequently transmuted its technical resources. If critical appraisal of his position in that American literary tradition is still ambivalent or non-committal, Steinbeck himself was far less confused about the issue, though for discretionary reasons he was circumspect. By this time, however, if we have been sensitive to the reflexive dimensions of his readerly theme, it should come as no surprise that he implicitly suggests his rightful place in the American literary tradition belongs not with thinly disguised reportage or journalism, but with the infinitely varied mode of symbolic fiction. *Huckleberry Finn*, *An American Tragedy*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *Main Street*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *As I Lay Dying* (A&A, p. 164) comprise enduring treasures for the collective American reader, but they are equally compass points for the individual American writer. In 1938, when he was forging his grandest achievement, *The Grapes of Wrath*, into "a truly American book," such novels were part of his creative landscape.<sup>58</sup> Three decades later, they were present again as landmarks in that fictive geography he wished permanently to inhabit.

Clearly, books occupied a momentous position in Steinbeck's life and art. The poetics of reading--whether for inspiration, creative atmosphere, general background, specific information, pure pleasure, or a host of other less well defined reasons--significantly shaped Steinbeck's sense of artistic place, as well as his creative and personal identity. "Home," he announced to Carlton Sheffield in 1964, is "only that place where the books are kept" (SLL, p. 798). In the enormous implications of that statement, Steinbeck fulfilled a condition he had been working toward all of his life. It was nothing less than a way of living and acting in the world.

## Notes

As a matter of convenience, the following symbols accompany parenthetical page references to Steinbeck's publications in this essay: A&A (*America and Americans*); ACTS (*The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*); COG (*Cup of Gold*); CR (*Cannery Row*); EE (*East of Eden*); GOW (*The Grapes of Wrath*); IDB (*In Dubious Battle*); JN (*Journal of a Novel*); POH (*The Pastures of Heaven*); LTE (*Letters to Elizabeth*); S&C (*Steinbeck and Covici*); SLL (*Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*); SOC (*Sea of Cortez*); TWC (*Travels with Charley*). For further information on texts and full publishing documentation for primary and secondary sources, consult the Abbreviations and Bibliography later in this book.

1. The anecdote about Steinbeck's reaction to *Prince Otto* originated with Gwyn, his second wife. It appears in Clifford Lewis' dissertation, "John Steinbeck: Architect of the Unconscious" (1972), p. 72.
2. John Steinbeck/Webster Street, Letter, 30 December 1957. Courtesy of Stanford University Library.
3. For forty years, critics from Edmund Wilson to Thomas Kiernan have emphasized Steinbeck's social realism technique at the expense of nearly everything else he wrote. For a writer who insisted on seeing the "toto" picture before making judgments, and for one who never much cared to write the same kind of book twice, this distortion is especially ironic. Examples are too numerous to list here, but the one-sided tradition is summarized in a recent anthology, *America in Literature* (New York: John Wiley, 1978), whose editors, Alan Trachtenberg and Benjamin DeMott, write: "The proper praise of Steinbeck is that he stands forth as the first gifted Anglo writer of this century to grasp the extraordinary resources the nation was losing by excluding migrants, Indians and Mexican-Americans from its ... mainstream" (II, 1332). Recently, however, there have been some notable challenges to Steinbeck's reputation as a Realist (or, in Woodburn O. Ross' phrase, "Naturalism's Priest"). For more enlightened (but by no means wholly sympathetic) considerations of Steinbeck's career, which attempt to uncover the deeper roots of his background and method, see Robert Murray Davis' Introduction to *Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1972), pp. 1-17; Lawrence William Jones, *John Steinbeck as Fabulist*, Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 3 (1973); Richard Astro, *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist* (1973); Warren

French, "John Steinbeck and Modernism," in Hayashi and Swan, eds., *Steinbeck's Prophetic Vision of America* (1976), pp. 35-55; and Jackson J. Benson's "John Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist," *Novel*, 10 (1977), 248-264.

4. Harry T. Moore paraphrased Steinbeck's statement in *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study* (1939), p. 94. It was first quoted in Peter Lisca's "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography," in Tedlock and Wicker, eds., *Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-Five Years* (1957), p. 4; and again in Lisca's *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (1958), p. 23, from where it has gained its popularity.

5. Except for numerous essays on Steinbeck's specific use of major literary sources (The Bible in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, Morte d'Arthur in *Tortilla Flat*, *Paradise Lost* in *In Dubious Battle*, Tao Teh Ching in *Cannery Row*, Shakespeare's plays in *The Winter of Our Discontent*), the general topic of his reading has been neglected. The chief exception is Richard Astro's *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts*, which establishes Steinbeck's reliance on books of scientific and holistic thought for his phalanx theory and subsequent fiction of the 1930s and 1940s. Otherwise, most discussions of Steinbeck's reading follow the brief list of titles and authors set out in Moore's *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, pp. 92-94, and essentially duplicated in Lisca's *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, pp. 23-25. Some useful additions to the basic list, however, appear in Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1963), p. 3; Clifford Lewis, "John Steinbeck: Architect of the Unconscious," pp. 72-73; and Roy S. Simmonds, *Steinbeck's Literary Achievement*, Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 6 (1976), pp. 34-36.

6. In Terry G. Halladay's thesis, "'The Closest Witness': The Autobiographical Reminiscences of Gwendolyn Conger Steinbeck" (1979), p. 66, Gwyn states that her husband "was horrified of plagiarism." If his eyes were tired from writing his own work, she read poetry to him.

7. Steinbeck's letter to Braley, dated 26 June 1934, appears in the latter's *Morgan Sails the Caribbean* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), pp. vii-viii; his observation about "texture" appears in a letter to Elizabeth Otis, 4 March 1958 (*ACTS*, p. 311).

8. See my essay, "The Interior Distances of John Steinbeck," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 12 (1979), 96. Earlier, in "Steinbeck and Hemingway," which appears in Hayashi, ed., *Steinbeck's Literary Dimension: A Guide to Comparative Studies* (1973), pp. 52-53, Peter Lisca noted that Steinbeck created a "fourth dimension" of external references by employing symbolism and

structure from other literary works. See also Moore, *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, pp. 92-94.

9. See Nelson Valjean, *John Steinbeck: The Errant Knight* (1975), pp. 39, 56; and Jackson J. Benson, "John Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist," pp. 252-253.

10. Information on Steinbeck's college career is from his transcript. Courtesy of Stanford University Registrar's Office.

11. Nelson Valjean, *John Steinbeck: The Errant Knight*, pp. 83-84; James D. Hart's Introduction to *John Steinbeck His Language* (Aptos, California, 1970), p. [7]; Susan F. Riggs, "Steinbeck at Stanford," *Stanford Magazine*, 4 (1976), 17; and Carlton Sheffield's Introduction to Florian J. Shasky and Susan F. Riggs, eds., *Letters to Elizabeth*, pp. viii-x.

12. On Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramee), see John Steinbeck/Carlton Sheffield, Letter, 1 November 1926. Courtesy of Stanford University Library. I am also grateful to Robert Cathcart and Carlton Sheffield for several letters in 1979 and 1980 detailing these aspects of Steinbeck's reading.

13. See Steinbeck's "On Learning Writing," *Writer's Yearbook*, 34 (1963), 10; and Riggs, "Steinbeck at Stanford," pp. 15, 17. I am also grateful to A. Grove Day (Letter, 24 September 1979) for further information on this period.

14. The typescript is at Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. In "Jungian Psychology and the Artistic Design of John Steinbeck," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 10 (1977), 89-97, Clifford Lewis, in an otherwise useful discussion, misses the redemptive aspect of Steinbeck's parody.

15. The typescript of "White Sister" is at Stanford University Library, as is Steinbeck's letter to Beswick, dated 22 May 1929.

16. John Steinbeck, "A Primer on the 30's," *Esquire*, 53 (1960), 87.

17. For more on Ricketts' library, before and after the fire, see Joel Hedgpeh's *The Outer Shores, Part 2: Breaking Through* (1978), pp. 22-24; and John Steinbeck, "About Ed Ricketts," in *The Log from the "Sea of Cortez"* (1951), pp. xv-xvii.

18. "About Ed Ricketts" is a loving personal reminiscence, but does occasionally play fast and loose with facts and implications. For necessary corrections and additions to the myth, Astro's *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts* is invaluable.



able. Joel Hedgpeth's two-volume *The Outer Shores* is indispensable, but editorializes too frequently against Steinbeck. See also Hedgpeth's "Philosophy on Cannery Row," in Astro and Hayashi, eds., *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work* (1971), pp. 89-129; and Richard F. Peterson, "Steinbeck's *The Log from the Sea Of Cortez*," in Hayashi, ed., *A Study Guide to Steinbeck, Part II* (1979), pp. 87-99.

19. See entry 19 in the Main Catalogue, and the corresponding Explanatory Note.

20. John Steinbeck/Carlton Sheffield, Letter, 30 June 1933 (my emphasis). Courtesy of Stanford University Library. This revealing section was excised from the first paragraph of the published version (*SLL*, p. 78).

21. Ricketts' essays are printed in Hedgpeth's *The Outer Shores, Part 2: Breaking Through: "Philosophy"* (pp. 69-79); "Morphology" (pp. 80-89). Ricketts worked on these pieces throughout the 1930s, but they did not receive their final shape until 1939-1940. His efforts to get them published were unsuccessful. See also Richard Astro's Western Writers Series pamphlet, Number 21, *Edward F. Ricketts* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1976), pp. 29-34.

22. John Steinbeck/Robert Ballou, Letter, late 1932. Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. In his section on Steinbeck in *Archetype West: The Pacific Coast as a Literary Region* (1976), William Everson says flatly that *To a God Unknown* is "clearly derived from Jeffers" (p. 83), though his focus and facts differ from mine.

23. *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts*, pp. 128-129.

24. Credit for uncovering the extent of the Steinbeck/Collins connection goes to Jackson J. Benson, "'To Tom Who Lived it': John Steinbeck and the Man from Weedpatch," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 5 (1976), 151-194; and Martha Heasley Cox, "Fact into Fiction in *The Grapes of Wrath*: The Weedpatch and Arvin Camps," in Hayashi, Hashiguchi, and Peterson, eds., *John Steinbeck: East and West*, Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 8 (1978), pp. 12-21.

25. Letter, late 1932. Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. In Halladay's thesis, "'The Closest Witness,'" Gwyn Steinbeck said that, in the 1940s, Steinbeck stayed away from contemporary work when he was writing for fear of stealing it "unconsciously" (p. 66). There is no reason to doubt the veracity of her statement, but it is a mistake to believe that he remained pure all the time. Steinbeck's repeated denials were often motivated by his public posture,

not necessarily his private beliefs. The issue of who and what he read among recent writers was compounded by his insouciant memory. "I'll lie," he told Professor C.N. Mackinnon of Ohio University in 1939, "not because I want to lie, but because I can't remember what is true and what isn't." When Steinbeck dropped the aggressive public mask, some revealing facts about his reading came through. For instance, on 10 May [1935], he told Lewis Gannett he read "few" books--"don't like fiction much," he said, then immediately countermanded his declaration with praise for Louis Paul and Willa Cather, and criticism for William Saroyan and Thomas Wolfe. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University. In response to this query by Merle Danford--"You read little fiction, but you like Thackeray's work"--Steinbeck replied, "Sure I like Thackeray, but I like a hundred others." "A Critical Study of John Steinbeck," Thesis (1939), p. 2.

26. "A Farewell to the 1930's," in Donohue, ed., *A Casebook on "The Grapes of Wrath"* (1968), p. 23.

27. Steinbeck's comments are contained in a three-page holograph manuscript that accompanies a letter to Pascal Covici, written in September, 1942. Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. The manuscript is in Steinbeck's handwriting but is titled "Introduction by Pascal Covici." It was apparently meant to introduce Covici's edition of the first *Viking Portable Library Steinbeck* (1943); Covici must have thought better of that idea, for he eventually wrote his own, quite different, introduction. Steinbeck's emphasis on the lasting effects of participation are also echoed in his brief piece, "In Awe of Words," which appeared in *The Exonian* in March, 1954, and in his interview with Diana, Lady Avebury, published as "Healthy Anger" in *Books and Bookmen*, October, 1958.

28. See Lawrence William Jones, "'A Little Play in Your Head': Parable Form in John Steinbeck's Post-War Fiction," *Genre*, 3 (1970), 55-63, his *John Steinbeck as Fabulist* (1973), and Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 3-4.

29. In the 1942 "Introduction by Pascal Covici" cited above, Steinbeck claimed that "the best balance of message and participation in all literature is the story of Jesus." Six years later he told Bo Beskow that he wanted to write a filmscript on "the life of Christ from the four Gospels" (*SLL*, p. 343). His work on Joan of Arc, instigated by the success of Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine* (Burgess Meredith/Robert DeMott, Interview, 16 June 1981), was never completed either, but did eventuate in "The Joan in All of Us," an essay

in *Saturday Review* for 14 January 1956. His reading and extensive field research on Zapata led to his filmscript *Viva Zapata!* (1952), directed by Elia Kazan. See entries 250 and 650 in the Main Catalogue.

30. Steinbeck was dismayed by Gwyn's refusal to let him have "the poetry, classics, travel and drama" books which he had "collected" (John Steinbeck/Gwyn Steinbeck, Letter, 20 February 1949). During the next two months Covici sent Steinbeck catalogues of Random House's Modern Library, Dutton's Everyman Library, Oxford's Classical Library and Viking's Portable Library. See Thomas Fensch, *Steinbeck and Covici* (1979), pp. 112, 128, 130; and entries 183, 184, 646, and 648 in the Main Catalogue, as well as 244--Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*--which Gwyn did not get.

31. Published in an era when formalist criticism held sway, *East of Eden* hardly received a fair shake from critics. Recently, however, with the increased tolerance toward all phases of experimental fiction, Steinbeck's novel is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. See especially John Ditsky's chapter "Towards a Narrational Self" in his *Essays on "East of Eden,"* Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 7 (1977), pp. 1-14; Paul McCarthy's *John Steinbeck* (1980), pp. 116-124; and Daniel Buerger's "'History' and Fiction in *East of Eden* Criticism," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 14 (1981), 6-14. *East of Eden* has never been out of print.

32. In Ray Freiman, ed., *The Author Looks at Format* (1951), pp. 32, 34. The book also included contributions by Van Wyck Brooks, Pearl Buck, Erskine Caldwell, Dorothy Canfield, John Dos Passos, John Hersey, Lionel Trilling, Thornton Wilder, and William Carlos Williams.

33. For instance, Tom Hamilton, one of Samuel's sons, is also an avid reader, but he lacks the resiliency to balance reading with experience: "Samuel rode lightly on top of a book and he balanced happily among ideas the way a man rides white rapids in a canoe. But Tom got a book, crawled and groveled between the covers, tunneled like a mole among the thoughts, and came up with the book all over his face and hands" (*EE*, p. 325). Tom's inability to use his reading properly foreshadows his eventual suicide.

34. See the annotations with entry 649 in the Main Catalogue. For more on the manner in which the *Meditations* appeal to Lee, see Richard C. Bedford, "Steinbeck's Uses of the Oriental," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 13 (1980), 14.

35. Joseph Fontenrose has taken Steinbeck to task for his "faulty translation" of Genesis 4:7, but concedes, somewhat

grudgingly, that a "fine meaning" can result. See *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1963), pp. 123-124. It might be more helpful to think of Steinbeck's translation as an inevitable "misreading": in *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), Harold Bloom says, "to imagine is to misinterpret" (p. 93).

36. See Steinbeck's succinct statement about his approach to composition in the Foreword to Fred Allen's *Much Ado About Me* (1956), entry 20 in the Main Catalogue, and his letter to Robert Wallsten, February, 1962 (*SLL*, pp. 736-737). Two representative statements indicate just how far apart critics are from agreeing about the structural integrity of *East of Eden*: Howard Levant, in *The Novels of John Steinbeck* (1974), says his "grasp of the major aesthetic problem, the unity of structure and materials, remains as fumbling as ever" (p. 235); while Lester Marks, in *Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck* (1969), calls the novel his "most accomplished work of craftsmanship" (p. 114).

37. *The Art of the Logos* (1935), entry 797 in the Main Catalogue. In a bilingual letter published with the Greek translation of *East of Eden* (Thessalonika: A.N. Suropoulos, [1953?]), Steinbeck wrote: "To have my work published in Greece is at once a pleasing and frightening thing. It is like a pigmy visiting at the home of the giants.... To the literature of the world, Greece is the mother. Perhaps this book is a wandering child come home to visit, hoping to be welcomed." See William B. Todd, *John Steinbeck: An Exhibition of American and Foreign Editions* (1963), pp. 26-27. Steinbeck's free interpretation of history is borne out in the excised section of *America and Americans*. "History," he said, "is based largely on fiction, opinion, and speculation" (TMS, p. 137). Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

38. John Steinbeck/Max Gordon, Letter, 4 June [1951]. Courtesy of John Steinbeck Library, Salinas, California. Steinbeck also subscribed to the Salinas newspapers and began receiving them in early April, 1951. They gave him "a sense of closeness with the region" (*JN*, p. 53). A month later he received an important letter from Elizabeth Ainsworth, his older sister, with "lots of details about the [Hamilton] family. So much is forgotten and only a little peaks through" (*JN*, p. 79). For more on the relationship between the historical and fictive Hamilton families, consult Martha Heasley Cox, "Steinbeck's Family Portraits: The Hamiltons," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 14 (1981), 23-32.

39. See entries 284, 316 and 354 in the Main Catalogue, and the corresponding Explanatory Notes.

40. Gunn's enormously popular book, first published in 1830, was originally called *Gunn's Domestic Medicine; or, Poor Man's Friend, in the House of Affliction, Pain, and Sickness*. Steinbeck used a later version, first entitled *Gunn's New Domestic Physician*, then, from about 1865 on, entitled *Gunn's New Family Physician*. Samuel Hamilton arrived in California around 1870, so it is reasonable to assume he had a version of the 1865 edition. In *East of Eden* (p. 12) Steinbeck notes specifically that it was a black book with gold letters--characteristic binding for *Gunn's New Family Physician*. All direct references will be to John C. Gunn, *Gunn's New Family Physician*, 100th ed., rev. and enl. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin, 1865). Hereafter *NFP*.

41. *East of Eden*, AMS, p. 106/216. Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. Except in the sense of imaginative possession, Steinbeck did not have his grandfather's copy of Gunn (Elaine Steinbeck/Robert DeMott, Letter, 31 January 1979). Apparently his sister gave the copy to her own son (a doctor), after whose death the book disappeared (Mrs. Eugene Ainsworth/Robert DeMott, Letter, 30 November 1979).

42. John Steinbeck/Elizabeth Otis, Letter, 24 February 1954. Courtesy of Stanford University Library. See also entry 160 in the Main Catalogue.

43. See Richard Astro, "Travels with Steinbeck; The Laws of Thought and the Laws of Things," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 8 (1975), 42-44.

44. John Steinbeck/Elizabeth Otis, 19 February 1962. Courtesy of Stanford University Library. Steinbeck was in Capri and apparently doing a great deal of reading. See entries 245, 639, 655, 695 and 777 in Main Catalogue.

45. See Adrian Goldstone and John R. Payne, *John Steinbeck: A Bibliographical Catalogue* (1974), Section C, "Contributions to Periodicals," pp. 129-137, for a complete listing of his 1950s journalism. The essays collected in *Un Américain à New York et à Paris* (now considered one of the rarest Steinbeck items) first appeared in *Punch*, *Holiday*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Figaro*.

46. Chase Horton/Robert DeMott, Interview, 20 August 1979. Horton was extremely modest about his role in helping Steinbeck "build a background" (*ACTS*, pp. 312, 318) for his book, and his efforts should not be underestimated. The extent of his involvement (as well as Steinbeck's appreciation) is documented in Steinbeck's letters to him in Ball State University's Alexander Bracken Library. Steinbeck's relationship with Vinaver is documented in a unique archive of nearly 50 letters

(covering 20 July 1957 to 14 December [1966]), which includes some of the longest and most substantive correspondence Steinbeck ever wrote. See Susan Riggs, *A Catalogue of the John Steinbeck Collection* (1980), pp. 115-119, for a listing. In "Steinbeck and Malory: A Correspondence with Eugène Vinaver," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 10 (1977), 70-79, Robin C. Mitchell surveys their friendship. The Bracken correspondence reveals that Steinbeck had read and admired Vinaver's work as early as 1956. Sometime in the first few months of 1957 he arranged for Vinaver to look over a rough translation of the *Morte*. Graham Watson, Steinbeck's British agent, reported that Vinaver was much impressed, but that some kind of royalty arrangement had to be made with Vinaver if Steinbeck planned to base his entire translation on the Clarendon Press edition. Steinbeck wrote his book with Vinaver in mind as the "jury" (*SLL*, p. 590; see also *ACTS*, p. xiii).

47. Steinbeck thought the Vatican Library was the most "exciting" place he ever saw (*SLL*, p. 552). During his stay in Rome in April and May, 1957, he apparently hired a helper to search the Vatican's Registry of Papal Letters for information about Malory's entanglements with the Church, and he prepared a one-page typewritten proposal, "Notes for the guidance of researcher in Vatican Library and Archives." He had made similar arrangements in Florence, where his research was aided by Anna Maria Burney, and by talks with Bernard Berenson and Armando Saporì. See the unexcised portions of his letter to Elizabeth Otis, 19 April 19[57]. Courtesy of Alexander Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Steinbeck's eagerness led to at least one unusual--and unsupported--discovery. At The Pierpont Morgan Library, looking over an "11th century Lancelot" manuscript with his 60x magnifying glass, he told John Frere that he found a "perfectly preserved" crab louse embedded in the owner's rubric, dated 1221 (*SLL*, p. 549). However, *Le Roman de Lancelot du Lac* dates from the 14th century, not the 11th; his reported conversation with a member of the library's staff has been called by the present curator an "unrecognized bit of Steinbeck fiction" (Herbert Cahoon/Robert DeMott, Letter, 27 September 1979).

48. See his letter to Otis and Horton, 14 March 1958, where he says he is "the writer who must write the writer as well as the *Morte*" (*ACTS*, p. 316); and his letter to Shirley Fisher, 10 August 1959, where he says, "in some ways [Lancelot] is me" (*SLL*, p. 647). For more on the dynamic transference of personality, see Laura Hodges, "Arthur, Lancelot, and the Psychodrama of Steinbeck," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 13 (1980), 71-79; and her "The Personae of *Acts*: Symbolic Repetition and

Variation," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 12 (1979), 20-27.

49. See Pascal Covici, Jr., "Steinbeck's Quest for Magnanimity (As Part of the Quest for John Steinbeck)," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 10 (1977), 80-82, for the complications involved in Steinbeck's attachment to Lancelot's symbolic attributes. The most explicit statement on the issue is Steinbeck's in a letter of 12 June 1961 to John Murphy: "I am just as terrified of my next book as I was of my first. It doesn't get easier. It gets harder and more heartbreaking and finally, it must be that one must accept the failure which is the end of every writer's life no matter what stir he may have made. In himself he must fail as Lancelot failed--for the Grail is not a cup. It's a promise that skips ahead and it never fails to draw us on. So it is that I would greatly prefer to die in the middle of a sentence in the middle of a book and so leave it as all life must be--unfinished" (*SLL*, p. 859).

50. Roy S. Simmonds also claims that Steinbeck became "overwhelmed by the materials he was handling." See "The Unrealized Dream: Steinbeck's Modern Version of Malory," in Hayashi, ed., *Steinbeck and the Arthurian Theme*, Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 5 (1975), p. 40.

51. Compare his statement to John Frere, 18 January 1957: "I've been doing some concentrated reading--a lovely thing--and not done by me in recent years. To read and read in one direction night and day; to pull an area and a climate of thinking over one's head like a space helmet--what a joy it is" (*SLL*, p. 548).

52. See Roy S. Simmonds, "A Note on Steinbeck's Unpublished Arthurian Stories," in Hayashi, ed., *Steinbeck and the Arthurian Theme*, Steinbeck Monograph Series, No. 5 (1975), pp. 25-29. Simmonds' comparison of Vinaver's one-volume edition of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* with Steinbeck's version shows that Steinbeck had completed an additional 154 page section called "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney" which was not included in Horton's edition of *The Acts of King Arthur*. (The total typescript, now at Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas, is 539 pages). By the end of the "Sir Gareth" section, Simmonds writes, "Steinbeck had translated only 183 of the total 707 pages of the Oxford Standard Authors text.... By a simple process of arithmetic it can be assumed that, had he finished the book, Steinbeck's completed typescript would have run to approximately 2,000 pages."

53. Vinaver's assessment is quoted in Roy S. Simmonds, "The Unrealized Dream: Steinbeck's Modern Version of Malory," (p. 43); Gardner's appeared in his review of *Acts* in the

*New York Times Book Review*, 24 October 1976, p. 31.

54. See Donna Gerstenberger, "Steinbeck's American Waste Land," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 11 (1965), 59-65; Richard C. Bedford, "The Genesis and Consolation of Our Discontent," *Criticism*, 14 (1972), 277-294; Kevin M. McCarthy, "Witchcraft and Superstition in *The Winter of Our Discontent*," *New York Folklore Quarterly*, 30 (1974), 197-211; John Ditsky, "The *Winter of Our Discontent*: Steinbeck's Testament on Naturalism," *Research Studies*, 44 (1976), 42-51; and Tetsumaro Hayashi, "Steinbeck's *Winter* as Shakespearean Fiction," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 12 (1979), 107-115.

55. Steinbeck's extended sojourn in "Camelot" sharpened his eye for America's contemporary decline, a subject he stressed upon his return from England in his highly publicized letter of 5 November 1959 to Adlai Stevenson. See *SLL* (pp. 651-653). Writing to Eugène Vinaver two days earlier, Steinbeck clarified his notion of moral purpose, and said he "wanted to write the process of dishonesty in terms of one man or one family, of the gradual change until what emerges wears the face of honesty and yet is based on a whole texture of the failure of honor." Courtesy of Stanford University Library.

56. Consult Steinbeck's moving and heart-felt letter of 1 April 1959 to Elia Kazan (*SLL*, pp. 624-628), and his letter to Joseph Fontenrose of 26 August 1958, which reads in part: "The myth seems always to be there 900 B.C. 450 B.C. 1450 A.D. 1958 A.D." Courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also entry 344 in the Main Catalogue.

57. Steinbeck's obsession with the dynamics of family life--especially the relationship between fathers and children--was a constitutive metaphor for most of his fiction between 1950 and 1961. *Burning Bright*, *East of Eden*, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, were, like the short story "His Father" (*Reader's Digest*, 1949), plotted around the father figure's real or apparent failure in realizing his quest, and the consequent effects of that action on his children. This pattern, which Steinbeck felt deeply in his own life, gave a moral integrity to *Winter*. The paragraphs on Hawley's optimistic decision and the emphasis on familial continuity were late additions to the novel--the final thirteen sentences of *Winter* were added by Steinbeck to the typescript, then capped by a final comment (which was later deleted): "And I hope this time it's clear. I really do hope so" (TMS, p. 443). Courtesy of The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City.

58. Quotation from entry for 18 June [1938], in Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath Journal," p. 10. Courtesy of Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.