

Steinbeck in Times of Crisis

March 11-13th, 2026

Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ

Keynote Speakers

Susan Shillinglaw, Professor Emeritus, San José State University
Barbara A. Heavilin, Professor Emeritus, Taylor University

Conference Director

Kathleen Hicks, Arizona State University

Conference Steering Committee

Danica Čerče, University of Ljubljana
Kevin Hearle, International Society of Steinbeck Scholars
Carter Davis Johnson, University of Kentucky
Nicholas P. Taylor, San José State University
Jeffrey Yeager, Bluefield State University

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Humanities Institute, ASU

Sponsored by the International Society of Steinbeck Scholars and *Steinbeck Review*

Wednesday, March 11

12:30pm Check In - Welcome and Reception opens in Room 197,
Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Weds 1:30pm - 2:45pm

Steinbeck's Migrants and Prisoners

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Kevin Hearle

Independent Scholar

“‘The Last Great Source of Foreign Labor’: Birthright Citizenship, Steinbeck, and Filipino Migrant Labor”

Amy Lu

Arizona State University

“From Prisoner to Activist: The Role of Incarceration in the Journey to Advocacy”

Brianna Gray

Arizona State University

“Travel, Empathy, and Moral Responsibility in Steinbeck’s America”

Weds 3:00pm - 4:15pm

Steinbeck's Mexico

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Susan Shillinglaw

Professor Emeritus, San José State University

"The Lure of Mexico: Steinbeck's Paisanos, Pisasters, and Revolutionaries."

Zak Breckenridge

University of Southern California

[“Borderland Ecologies: Aldo Leopold and John Steinbeck in Mexico”](#)

Weds 4:30pm - 5:45pm

Steinbeck Research Tools and Pedagogy

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Peter Van Coutren

San Jose State University

“A view of the Steinbeck Center archives”

John Holland

The Steinbeck Experience

“Turning Over Stones: Reimagining Public Engagement and the "Un-Museum"
Experience on Cannery Row”

Thursday, March 12

Thurs 8:00am - 9:15am (Online Sessions)

Steinbeck's Female Characters

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/2795360180>

Elanur Williams

Independent Scholar

"Cathy and Alice: Acts of Refusal and Radical Autonomy of Self-Definition in *East of Eden*"

The Exploration of Humanity in Steinbeck's Writing

Jeffrey Lemasters Tahir

Independent Scholar

"Sharing Steinbeck with Steinbeck: Exploring Steinbeck's Words to Share God with Steinbeck"

Thurs 9:30am - 10:45am (Concurrent Online Sessions)

Steinbeck in Times of Crisis

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/2795360180>

Ramisha Nabila

Independent Scholar

"Steinbeck in Times of War: Negotiating Human Suffering and Social Inequality from the Dust Bowl to Contemporary Crises in *The Grapes of Wrath*"

Christine Peterson

New Mexico State University/ Dona Ana Community College

"Surveillance isn't new: how to teach, engage and have students critically reflect on commonalities with Steinbeck's times"

Ecology, Environment and Space

Room 117, Ross-Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/7777043129>

Sarah Coduto

Stanford University

“From the tidepool to the stars and back again’: Relational Ecology and Environmental Form in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*”

Cecilia Donohue

Independent Scholar

“Contested Spaces in Small Places: Steinbeck’s *The Long Valley*”

Thurs 11:00am - 12:15pm

Keynote Address: “Steinbeck’s Jeremiad: America on the Brink in Travels with Charley”

Room 117, Ross-Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/7777043129>

Barbara A. Heavilin

Professor Emeritus, Taylor University

Susan Shillinglaw

Professor Emeritus, San José State University

Thurs 12:15pm - 1:15pm

Lunch

197, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Thurs 1:30pm - 2:45pm (Concurrent Sessions)

Steinbeck and Ecology

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/2795360180>

Sarah Tanner

University of South Carolina

"Eco-spirituality and Frontier Masculinity in Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*"

Rebecca Trinh

Green Flash Conservation Science/Blue Marble Space Institute of Science

“Shifting Tides: How has the Sea of Cortez changed since the era of Steinbeck and Ricketts?”

John Holland

The Steinbeck Experience

“Navigating the Crisis of Abundance”

International Steinbeck (Concurrent Sessions)

Room 117, Ross Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/7777043129>

Nick Taylor

San Jose State University

“Discovering Steinbeck's Influence on Algerian Novelist Mohammed Dib (1920-2003)”

Kiyoshi Yamauchi

Niimi University

“Where the Road of John Steinbeck’s Travels with Charley: In Search of America and that of Matsuo Basho’s Oku no Hosomichi (The Narrow Road to Oku) cross”

Annalee Ith

Arizona State University

“Cultural Preservation through Time and Space: An Analysis of John Steinbeck’s A Russian Journal and Contemporary Cambodian American Poetry”

Thurs 3:00pm - 4:15pm

Steinbeck, War, & Group Man

Room 117, Ross Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/7777043129>

Yasuhiro Sakai

Professor Emeritus of English at National Institute of Technology, Yonago College, Tottori, Japan

“Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday: ‘A Midautumn-Twilight Dream’ from ‘Gregorian Music’ to ‘Polyphony’”

John Castiglione

Independent Scholar

“John Steinbeck Was Right”

Amelia Frederking

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

“The Defining Role of Emotions on the Battlefield: How Emotions Determine the Actors, Prolongation, and Fundamental Nature of Warfare”

Thurs 4:30pm - 5:45pm

Steinbeck as Social Critic

Room 117, Ross Blakley Hall

Online: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/7777043129>

Danica Čerče

University of Ljubljana

“America and Americans: From National Focus to Multipolar Context”

Lauretta Frederking

University of Western Ontario

“The Enduring American Dream in Steinbeck's America”

Ethan Francois

Arizona State University

“Towards A Moral Masculinity: Prosperity, Responsibility, and the American Soul in Steinbeck”

Carter Johnson

University of Kentucky

“Translating Crisis: A Reevaluation of Steinbeck's The Acts of King Arthur”

Friday, March 13

Fri 9:30am - 10:45am

Steinbeck's Moral Vision

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Samantha Covais

Binghamton University

“Steinbeck, Disability, and Agency”

Jeff Yeager

Bluefield State University

“The Weakest Must Be Defended’: Re-Reading Of Mice and Men as a Treatise on Human Dignity”

Fri 11am - 12:30pm

John Steinbeck, Censorship and Hollywood’s Production Code Administration

Room 196, Humanities Institute, Ross-Blakley Hall

Brooklyn McCluskey

Arizona State University

“Adapting Of Mice and Men Under The Production Code”

Wilson Arnpriester

Arizona State University

“The Grapes of Wrath, Censorship and Hollywood’s Production Code Administration”

Olivia Klopf

Arizona State University

“Adapting an Epic: East of Eden (1955) from Page to Screen”

Kevin Sandler

Arizona State University

“Alfred Hitchcock's Lifeboat, John Steinbeck, and the Production Code Administration”

Abstracts and Bios

Wilson Arnpriester

Arizona State University

Presentation

The Grapes of Wrath, Censorship and Hollywood's Production Code Administration

Abstract

The Grapes of Wrath (1940) was released on the heels of its namesake novel's extraordinary success and subsequent controversy. The novel was the best-selling book of 1939 and on its way to winning the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Steinbeck's previous film adaptation, *Of Mice and Men* (1939), had just been nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. In tandem with Steinbeck and his most recent work's rising status, the novel also engendered controversy due to its realistic but profane language and political themes regarding the working class, unions, corrupt policing, and wealthy farmers. The novel was banned in several places, especially California farming towns that did not take kindly to the representation of their industry practices. These controversies, paired with the novel's historical context—tackling issues present throughout the Great Depression and released in the shadow of a second world war beginning in Europe—presented a problem for the Production Code Administration as well as the film's producers. The filmmakers had to work to compromise the novel's thematic content with the requirements of the Production Code and the trappings of Hollywood convention to appeal to general audiences. This presentation argues that the final film was a product of the film's historical and political context and how that context was navigated within the film's production (chiefly by producer Darryl Zanuck) and by the Production Code Administration in efforts to soften political themes, manage potential accusations of libel and communist propaganda, and produce a generally appealing final picture.

Bio

I am an ASU alum with my bachelors degree in Film and Media Studies.

Zak Breckenridge

University of Southern California

Presentation

Borderland Ecologies: Aldo Leopold and John Steinbeck in Mexico

Abstract

We often think of environmentalist ideas as originating in the United States, only to be later exported to other countries. But Mexico was an important imaginative and experiential resource for U.S. environmental writers in the early twentieth century. This presentation focuses on two writers whose travels in Mexico shaped their protean understanding of ecology: Aldo Leopold and John Steinbeck. Their scientific and imaginative formulation of ecological ideas helped to transform conservationism into the modern environmental movement. On trips to both the Colorado River Delta and the Sierra Madre in the 1920s, Leopold realized that he had only seen “sick land” in the United States, and began to think that “wilderness” could be not only a recreational resource, but a benchmark for ecosystemic health. Likewise, Steinbeck’s expedition to the Gulf of California with Ed Ricketts in 1940, recorded in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, combined ecological research with ecological speculation. For both writers, Mexico was a window into the ecological past and a resource for speculating about an ecologically sane future. Together, these case studies show the enduring importance of Mexican ecologies for U.S. environmental thought and writing.

Bio

Zak Breckenridge is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Southern California who conducts research in the environmental humanities, science and literature, and the history of materialist thought. His writing has appeared in *Western American Literature*, *SFRA Review*, *Edge Effects*, and *Public Books*, among other venues. He hosts the podcast *Erratics*, which examines the recently shuttered small liberal arts college he attended.

John Castiglione

Independent Scholar

Presentation

John Steinbeck Was Right

Abstract

In what would prove to be the apex of his artistic career spanning the crises of the Great Depression and World War II, Steinbeck developed the core theme not just of his fictional work but of his personal socio-political perspective: the concept of “group man, in which separate

biological units act in concert to become one organism driven with common purpose. Deployed in his fiction most fully in 1936's *In Dubious Battle* and 1939's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and applied to the natural sciences in 1941's *The Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck would refine his "group man" theory in 1942's *The Moon is Down*. Often derided as unconvincing or even propagandistic, *The Moon is Down* should be acknowledged by critics and scholars as introducing an important refinement in Steinbeck's "group man" theory: while in the lower animal orders, the massing of individual creatures into a collective organism is a morally neutral fact of biology that serves to protect and grow each species, in the higher order of humanity, there are actually two kinds of group men, one good and noble, the other bad and (Steinbeck prophesied) destined to fail. "Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat," says Steinbeck, through the voice of Mayor Orden in *The Moon is Down*. "Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars." Given the present and growing crisis in which the embodied faces of Steinbeck's socio-political project -- migrant workers -- have been targeted for exploitation or even elimination, new attention should be paid to how Steinbeck actually articulated his "group man" theory, and what that refinement means for us, artistically and politically, today.

Bio

John Castiglione is an independent scholar. He has recently published critical analysis focusing on Steinbeck's late-career work, including examinations of *Sweet Thursday* and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, and he has a forthcoming article in *The Steinbeck Review* analyzing Steinbeck's contribution to American noir fiction. He has also published legal academic scholarship focusing on the Fourth and Eighth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Mr. Castiglione has practiced law in New York since 2006.

Danica Čerče

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

Presentation

America and Americans: From National Focus to Multipolar Context

Abstract

In the 1960s, deeply imbued with the moral ethos of Malory's legends, John Steinbeck became acutely unsettled by two dominant impressions of his homeland: a pervasive moral drift and an unrelenting restlessness. In a letter to Adlai Stevenson, he not only voiced his conviction that

the American system demanded urgent re-examination but also signalled his own determination to undertake that task. This awareness of national malaise permeates all his subsequent writing: the novel *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) and his two non-fiction works, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962) and *America and Americans* (1966).

With the focus on America and Americans, this paper presents Steinbeck as both a discerning analyst of his nation's moral and cultural contradictions, and a prophet whose insights extend far beyond his own time and place. Indeed, read today—nearly sixty years later and against the backdrop of intensifying political polarization, accelerating technological change, and mounting global challenges—one can recognize how prescient Steinbeck's observations remain. His warnings about moral dislocation and social fragmentation reverberate not only in the present-day United States but also across many societies grappling with climate change, mass migration, technological disruption and existential anxiety—new manifestations of the very “success” Steinbeck feared could destroy Americans. The paper argues that, far from a dated national portrait, *America and Americans* is a work that endures as a strikingly relevant meditation on the vulnerabilities and possibilities of modern life.

Bio

Danica Čerče is a Full Professor of Literatures in English and a current Head of English Department at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Her research interests include contemporary American and Australian literature and translation studies, with the focus on John Steinbeck's fiction, Native and Black American drama and Indigenous Australian writing. She is the author of three monograph publications, several book chapters in edited collections and a number of articles in Slovene and foreign academic journals. Čerče serves on the Editorial Board of *Coolabah*, *Steinbeck Review* and *Acta Neophilologica*.

Sarah Coduto

Stanford University

Presentation

“From the tidepool to the stars and back again”: Relational Ecology and Environmental Form in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*

Abstract

In letters to his editor, Pascal Covici, and to his college roommate, John Steinbeck described *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* as accomplishing “a new kind of writing” and a “new thinking,” one

influenced by what he saw as the “great poetry in scientific thinking.” What was this “new kind of writing,” and what was its relationship to the scientific observation Steinbeck performed on his tide pooling expedition into the Gulf of Mexico? In this paper, I argue that *The Log* is an experiment in what I am calling “ecological form,” a term that describes a phenomenologically grounded model of scientific study; an ecosystem map attentive to the dense matrices of connections and interdependencies between humans, plant and animal life, and the natural world; and their formal correlative in the text’s rhetoric of description. Thinking with Donna Haraway, Stacy Alaimo, Lawrence Buell, and other theorists of ecocriticism, I offer that Steinbeck’s ecological form contains an implicit ethical stance in which human and more-than-human nature are understood as similarly imbricated in evolutionary, perceptual, and ecological chains of mutual dependence and involvement.

Bio

Sarah Coduto is a PhD candidate in English, with a minor in Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies, at Stanford University. Their dissertation presents a textual and cultural history of American homonationalism from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries.

Samantha Covais

Binghamton University

Presentation

Steinbeck, Disability, and Agency

Abstract

As John Steinbeck is refining his political and ethical philosophies and writing his earliest novels in the 1930s, the eugenics movement haunts the United States, and Europe is barreling quickly towards fascism and genocide. Persons with disabilities bear the brunt of this brutal marginalization, and Steinbeck, aware of this, lovingly crafts characters who have disabilities as a result of both biological and social conditions: some of his characters are born with their disabilities and others become disabled due to faulty machinery at exploitative jobs or too many beatings. This paper aims to examine the relationship between what Vincent Benlloch calls Steinbeck’s almost contradictory portrayal of “a determining and disaffected universe” and “an ontologically valuable and actionable human subject” through the lens of disability. By analyzing portrayal of disabilities in *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*, I aim to show how Steinbeck gives agency to a marginalized social group in a world determined to brutalize and exploit them.

Further, I will demonstrate how Steinbeck's disabled characters instigate substantial sociopolitical progress and radically nurture the wellbeing of themselves and others.

Bio

Samantha Covais is a doctoral candidate in Binghamton University's English Department. Her academic research focuses primarily on philia and masculinity in 20th and 21st century American literature, particularly the works of Steinbeck, Faulkner, Wright and Morrison, as well as the intersection of philosophy, theology, and literature.

Cecilia Donohue

Independent Scholar

Presentation

Contested Spaces in Small Places: Steinbeck's The Long Valley

Abstract

The notion of physical space as an integral element in interpersonal exchanges first garnered attention in the middle of the twentieth century. The study of space's significance in fiction gained traction through the close of the century and continues today. The significance of space and its outsized role in both factual and fictional quests for identity, recognition, respect, hospitality, and even a basic sense of belonging is readily apparent in John Steinbeck's early twentieth century classics *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), in which the bindlestiffs of the bunkhouse and the Joads, respectively, seek validation despite tangible resistance and denial from the spaces they

must inhabit. Drawing on recent critical analyses and the connections between topology and place/space configurations, this paper argues that Steinbeck recognized and expanded the role of space in early writings far less lengthy than his novellas or mega novels, as diverse battles for contested space are played out in selected short stories from *The Long Valley* (1938).

Bio

Cecilia Donohue enjoyed a 25-year career of undergraduate instruction, graduate teaching, and academic administration. She contributed two articles to essay anthologies published in 2025. "Inspiring Travels with Charley: John Steinbeck and the Millennial Multitiered Quest" appeared in *Steinbeck's Uneasy America: Rereading Travels with Charley*, while "Scaling the 'Ladder of Years': Anne Tyler's Trilogy of Aging" was included in *Fiction and*

Poetry to Help Us Age: Criticism and Reflections by Professors of Literature. Cecilia currently serves as an Associate Editor of The Steinbeck Review, has contributed articles to The Literary Encyclopedia, and reviews essays for MELUS.

Ethan Francois

Arizona State University

Presentation

Towards A Moral Masculinity: Prosperity, Responsibility, and the American Soul in Steinbeck

Abstract

This paper examines how John Steinbeck's fiction interfaces with American identity through his contrasting portrayals of Jim Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Ethan Allen Hawley in *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961). While scholars have explored his grasp of ecological ethics, labor politics, and views of human agency, little attention has been given to how Steinbeck utilizes masculinity as a barometer of national crisis. My essay contends that Steinbeck uses his male protagonists as diagnostic tools for measuring the moral condition of their respective historical eras.

In the midst of the Depression-era crisis, Steinbeck offers Jim Casy as a redemptive model of manhood—one grounded in communal responsibility, empathetic suffering, and courage. Casy's moral masculinity emerges precisely from crisis: the deprivation of the 1930s produces a man capable of solidarity, self-sacrifice, and astounding moral clarity. In contrast, the moral backsliding of the 1960s that *The Winter of Our Discontent* brings to life is one born out of abundance, not scarcity. Ethan Allen Hawley embodies the spiritual dangers Steinbeck saw in postwar prosperity: moral paralysis, self-protective isolation, and cowering away from his responsibility to others. Hawley becomes Steinbeck's late-career warning that a nation can lose its soul not only through want, but through the comforts that dull empathy and weaken moral resolve.

Drawing on Steinbeck's essays, letters, and recent scholarship, this paper argues that Steinbeck's use of masculine archetypes in these two men reflect his concern that America's greatest crises were increasingly internal and ethical rather than economic or external. In placing Casy and Hawley in dialogue, the paper reveals Steinbeck's most urgent question in times of moral crisis: "What kind of men—and what kind of nation—will we choose to become by emulating Hawley rather than Casy?"

Bio

Ethan Francois holds an M.A. in English literature from Arizona State University whose research interests include twentieth-century literature, narrative form, and theopoetics in culture. His work examines how stories about real people shape collective memory and cultural imagination. He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma with his wife and is active in his local arts and nonprofit community.

Amelia Frederking

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Presentation

The Defining Role of Emotions on the Battlefield: How Emotions Determine the Actors, Prolongation, and Fundamental Nature of Warfare

Abstract

In the opening sentences of *The Moon is Down*, Steinbeck identifies a perception of finality among occupying forces following their seizure of a northern European town: “By ten-forty-five it was all over.” But what exactly does “it” refer to? “The town was occupied, the defenders defeated,” however the final claim, that the war was “finished” was far from true. Though strategic leaders planned the initial seizure meticulously, their failure to plan for the subsequent consolidation of gains renders the occupying troops vulnerable to a hostile civilian uprising. According to the US Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, “consolidating gains” encompasses the “activities to make enduring any initial operational success and to set the conditions for a sustainable security environment.” As the occupying troops quickly learn, stability cannot be achieved through brute military force. Mayor Orden of the occupied town pinpoints the primary impediment to their operational success: their failure to “understand the people.” The occupying forces, an unidentified military portrayed in Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down*, inadvertently incite powerful emotions among the townspeople that precipitate resistance and perpetuate violence, undermining the ability to achieve their strategic objectives.

Bio

Amelia Frederking is a PhD student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the Department of Political Science specializing in Security Studies. Her research interests include military recruitment, conflict mobilization, and military decision-making processes. Amelia graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with a BA in Political Science and Mathematics.

Lauretta Frederking

University of Western Ontario

Presentation

The Enduring Theme of Anticipating Eden in Steinbeck's America

Abstract

In current times, renunciation of the American Dream threatens the ideas that the country was built upon and arguably, the same ideas necessary for its best future. From Steinbeck, we understand that safeguarding American prosperity depends upon individuals believing in both the promise of an accessible American dream and their agency in attaining it. Though Steinbeck's novels depict bleak visions of the lives of laborers struggling to earn fair compensation, the very act of struggle, of protest, of getting up and migrating to the next job, demonstrates a persistent faith in the possibility of the future. The discontent that Steinbeck portrays is, simultaneously and more optimistically, the passionate belief in the imminence of the "American Dream" and an aggressive impatience to achieve it.

Steinbeck articulates the puzzle that I weigh in terms of U.S. democracy in modern times:

To what extent does the current political system preserve that critical balance of economic optimism and individual incentives. Steinbeck does not dictate particular policies, but his writing suggests American greatness results from collective discontent and a sustained hope of imminently attainable individual prosperity. Does Steinbeck's historic America suggest a viable or volatile future?

Bio

I serve as Associate Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and I am also a Political Science Professor (Full Professor rank) at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. My relevant publications include an edited volume, Hemingway on Rebellion, and a chapter on Emile Zola's *Germinal* included in a book on teaching methods in political science.

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Brianna Gray

Arizona State University

Presentation

Travel, Empathy, and Moral Responsibility in Steinbeck's America

Abstract

In America, travel has always been more than geography, it determines who we are as we move throughout the world. Within *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, Steinbeck presents four purposes for travel: displacement, survival, exploration, and escape. Families in *The Grapes of Wrath* travel due to necessity and survival, therefore it is involuntary. In contrast, *Travels with Charley* demonstrates travel as deliberate and intentional. Each book was written during a large national event, one was created out of collective suffering during the Great Depression and the other during the anxiety of the Cold War. For Steinbeck, travel was never just movement but a moral practice, a way of learning how to recognize others and how to understand them, even through hard times. Ultimately, Steinbeck suggests that human connection is born from empathy and is the foundation of moral resilience in America. His portrayal of travel evolves from a communal struggle for survival in *The Grapes of Wrath* to solitary searching in *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. Both journeys pose the same question: what do we owe each other?

Bio

Brianna Gray earned an associates in Business Administration from Montana State University - Billings and is currently a senior at Arizona State University studying English. With a love for travel and the outdoors, she pulls inspiration from her adventures. Currently living in Montana, she is a stay at home mom with aspirations to work in publishing and help keep the written word alive.

Kevin Hearle

Independent Scholar

Presentation

"The Last Great Source of Foreign Labor": Birthright Citizenship, Steinbeck, and Filipino Migrant Labor

Abstract

Since Charles Wollenberg's 1988 "Introduction" to Steinbeck's *The Harvest Gypsies*, it has been

commonplace for critics to excoriate Steinbeck for the racism of believing that California agriculture would change because the Okies and their fellow Dust Bowl exiles were white. We critics, however, all failed to consider the historical context which Steinbeck provides. In the 6th chapter, Steinbeck notes, "With the establishment of the Philippine Islands as an autonomous nation, the 35,000 Filipinos in California have suddenly become aliens." The planned 10 year Commonwealth phase of the relationship between the U.S. and The Philippines began in 1934 with the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Even though the Philippines had been a U.S. possession since December of 1898, and was still a U.S. Commonwealth, Filipinos in the U.S. had been immediately recategorized as "aliens" who were strongly "encouraged" to repatriate themselves to the Philippines. New immigration from there was immediately reduced to 50 Filipinos per year. Steinbeck also notes, "These young men were not permitted to bring their women." What Steinbeck doesn't mention, but Rick Baldoz does is that while the Philippines was a U.S. territory, the status of the Filipinos in California was a constant source of legal dispute, leading to the creation of a new non-citizen but nevertheless "American" legal status and to much litigation. That the Filipinos in the U.S. were as successful as they were in those disputes helped convince the U.S. Congress to get rid of the Philippines. That the Okies were U.S. citizens and could not be forced to leave their families behind created complications which made it reasonable for Steinbeck to conclude that agriculture in California would have to change. Had World War II not altered everything, Steinbeck's prediction might have come to pass.

Bio

Kevin Hearle is the Vice President of the International Society of Steinbeck Scholars, and a widely published scholar on California Literature. The 2005 recipient of the Burkhardt Prize from the Ball State University Foundation as the year's Outstanding Steinbeck Scholar, he was the revision editor of the 2nd Viking Critical Library Edition of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*: Text and Criticism, Co-editor of *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck*, the editor of *The Essential Mary Austin*, and a founding member of the editorial boards of *Steinbeck Newsletter*, *Steinbeck Studies*, and *Steinbeck Review*. He has taught at the University of Iowa, Coe College, UC Santa Cruz, San Jose State University, California State University—Los Angeles, Notre Dame de Namur University, and Santa Clara University, and was from 2008 through 2013 a Visiting Scholar at the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University. He is also the author of the National Poetry Series finalist, *Each Thing We Know Is Changed Because We Know It*, and *Other Poems*.

John Holland

The Steinbeck Experience

Presentation #1

Navigating the Crisis of Abundance

Abstract

Problem & Crisis Context

Steinbeck studies faces a "crisis of abundance": seven decades of criticism, vast primary texts, and degrading audio archives create a volume challenging traditional synthesis. In the AI era, the crisis is not information scarcity, but the human capacity to retrieve and contextualize it accurately within the digital frontier.

Focus & Research Question

This paper introduces the "Steinbeck Digital Scholar," a digital humanities project examining how AI tools restructure research workflows. It asks: How can "off-the-shelf" Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), audio-processing AI and machine transcription bridge the gap between disorderly archives and deep, verifiable insight?

Approach / Method

The methodology centers on a Google NotebookLM instance populated with ~300 sources, including Steinbeck's complete bibliography, volumes of commentary and criticism, Steinbeck Journals, and machine transcribed interviews, lectures, panels and films. Unlike hallucination-prone open LLMs, this RAG approach grounds responses strictly in uploaded texts, enabling citation validation. Additionally, the workflow utilizes non-generative AI to restore noisy audio, enhancing clarity for machine transcription and recovering lost oral histories.

Connection to Steinbeck's Life and Themes

Engaging "Steinbeck's relevance to understanding our past and the future" and "Steinbeck on thinking," this project re-evaluates the "craft" of scholarship. It proposes that future inquiry requires collaboration between human insight and machine retrieval to manage the cognitive load of a sprawling literary history.

Findings / Expected Insights

Preliminary work demonstrates RAG architectures democratize deep research, surfacing obscure connections otherwise buried. Findings suggest that when constrained by source-grounding, AI shifts from a generator of fiction to a reliable research assistant, mitigating the "crisis of truth" associated with generative models.

Contribution & Relevance

This presentation offers a replicable framework for digital humanities, demonstrating how scholars can harness AI to preserve and analyze the Steinbeck research canon without compromising accuracy or rigor.

Presentation #2

Turning Over Stones: Reimagining Public Engagement and the "Un-Museum" Experience on Cannery Row

Abstract

In an era of fragmenting attention spans and deepening ecological disconnect, the "crisis" facing literary studies is not one of relevance, but of reach. How do we translate the urgent social and environmental ethics of John Steinbeck to a distracted 21st-century public? In *Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck and Ricketts observed: "Our fingers turned over the stones, and we saw life that was like our life."

This presentation argues that the survival of Steinbeck's legacy depends on our ability to encourage a new generation to metaphorically and physically "turn over the stones" around them. We introduce "The Steinbeck Experience," a nascent initiative designed to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and the six million annual visitors to Cannery Row.

Moving beyond the traditional, static museum model located in Salinas, this project proposes an agile, location-based "un-museum" situated directly in the tourist epicenter of Monterey. We will explore how leveraging immersive technologies—such as 3D virtualizations of the *Western Flyer* or Pacific Biological Laboratories—can transform passive tourism into active inquiry. By meeting the public where they physically are, we can utilize Steinbeck's cultural authority to champion social and environmental equity, demonstrating how experiential learning can turn casual visitors into engaged citizens.

Bio

John Holland is the Founder of The Steinbeck Experience, a nonprofit organization dedicated to popularizing the legacy of John Steinbeck in Monterey County and around the world. Previously the Executive Director of the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, CA, Mr. Holland is pursuing

new ways to engage the general public in experiencing John Steinbeck's life, literature, legacy and lessons.

Annalee Ith

Arizona State University

Presentation

Cultural Preservation through Time and Space: An Analysis of John Steinbeck's *A Russian Journal* and Contemporary Cambodian American Poetry

Abstract

In 1947, John Steinbeck and war photographer Robert Capa traveled through the Soviet Union seeking to document the everyday lives of working-class citizens. The result, *A Russian Journal*, is often treated as a Cold War travel narrative. Yet, Steinbeck's observations and Capa's photographs unexpectedly created a deeper inquiry into how communities reconstruct cultural identity after mass trauma. This paper seeks to answer: How does John Steinbeck's depiction of cultural resilience in *A Russian Journal* illuminate a broader, enduring pattern of how communities preserve identity after mass trauma? Although *A Russian Journal* has received limited scholarly attention, existing criticism speaks to the limitations of Steinbeck's outsider perspective and his deliberate omission of Soviet political realities. However, these critiques also acknowledge the value of his close attentions to ritual, foodways, language, humor, and the arts.

Building on this insight, this paper offers a new reading of *A Russian Journal* by placing it in conversation with contemporary Cambodian American poetry that explores intergenerational memory and post-genocide cultural reconstruction. Through this comparative lens, Steinbeck's humanistic focus on everyday acts of cultural continuity anticipates modern understandings of cultural resilience, offering an early conversation on how communities sustain identity in the aftermath of war and displacement.

Bio

Annalee Ith is a 26-year-old, queer, Cambodian American aspiring poet. She received her bachelor's degree in English from Arizona State University. She has a primary interest in contemporary Asian American poetry.

Carter Johnson

University of Kentucky

Presentation

Translating Crisis: A Reevaluation of Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur*

Abstract

John Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* is rarely discussed in Steinbeck scholarship. Despite the author's lifelong interest in Malory and nearly a decade of work on the translation, critical evaluations typically circumvent the text in two ways: they either 1) dismiss the work as fundamentally an aesthetic failure or 2) focus on the biographic significance of the project in understanding the aging Steinbeck. In either case—and they often coexist—the actual text is not seriously examined. My paper will reevaluate *Acts* along two dimensions. First, I will argue that the novel's prose is not aesthetically weak. While drafting in 1959, Steinbeck wrote that "it is the best prose I have ever written." Although we don't have to take him at his word, his evaluation ought to prompt our reexamination. I will argue that the difference in Steinbeck's prose is not emblematic of artistic decline but rebirth and development. Steinbeck anticipated this critical confusion, "It doesn't sound like me because I don't want it to...I changed myself because I was sick of myself." Second, I will explore the rich cultural commentary that Steinbeck voices through the knights and their adventures. Specifically, I will argue that Lancelot's trail is a warning to mid-century American society, admonishing the reader to resist the dialectical decay of affluence and the vacuity of power-based morality. I hope this paper will reignite interest in *Acts*, a book which is so acutely attuned to cultural (both American and Medieval) "crisis."

Bio

Carter Davis Johnson is finishing his PhD in American literature at the University of Kentucky. His scholarly interests revolve around the intersection of eco-criticism, philosophy, and the literature of the American West.

Olivia Klopf

Arizona State University

Presentation

Adapting an Epic: *East of Eden* (1955) from Page to Screen

Abstract

Adapted from the fourth quarter of John Steinbeck's epic drama novel, *East of Eden* (1955), is

considered a classic. Despite only portraying the last part of the story and centering on brothers Cal and Aron and their estranged parents, the story still brought contention via its implicit representation of prostitution and moral hypocrisy, subjects that challenged the Production Code's restraint. The film's scope is significantly limited, yet it still provokes controversy, ultimately raising the question of what outcry would ensue from a complete adaptation—and why this story is so contentious and compelling.

By examining the correspondence between the Production Code Administration's enforcers and those involved in the creative process, we can see that both artistic intention and negotiated censorship contribute to a film that is both contained and transgressive of social conventions. The interplay between the Production Code's moral prescriptions, the thematic preservation of human complexity per the novel, and Kazan's relationship-driven direction shape the film's final form. *East of Eden* stands as a case of artists navigating the boundaries of moral representation while preserving emotional authenticity and literary integrity within the Production Code's framework.

Bio

I am an honors undergraduate student studying Film and Media Studies and Psychology at Arizona State University. My academic interests include film, screenwriting, and television studies.

Jeffrey Lemasters Tahir

Independent Scholar

Presentation

Sharing Steinbeck with Steinbeck: Exploring Steinbeck's Words to Share God with Steinbeck

Abstract

John Steinbeck openly rejected any religious pathway or belief in God. Despite these facts, Steinbeck crafted deeply spiritual characters who demonstrated a belief in human's capacity for goodness that shines a light on the divine. An exploration into the character structure presented in the individuals depicted in *Of Mice and Men*, *Cannery Row*, and *Grapes of Wrath*, as well as his own depiction of himself in *Travels with Charley* presents a deeper understanding of the character of God than any individual religious pathway. In and through his agnosticism, John Steinbeck presents God in a pure, unvarnished, and human image. An exploration of humanity in John Steinbeck reveals a God that Steinbeck understood far more than he realized. The

greatest testimony to reveal God to Steinbeck was Steinbeck's own writing. This paper will reveal God by sharing Steinbeck with Steinbeck.

Bio

In addition to being an Old Testament theologian, Jeffrey has a background in English Literature and Linguistics. Jeffrey has served as a Lawyer, Magician, and Security Guard. Currently he is a pastor and speaker.

Amy Lu

Arizona State University

Presentation

From Prisoner to Activist: The Role of Incarceration in the Journey to Advocacy

Abstract

"The Grapes of Wrath" and "In Dubious Battle" both have characters that give insight into Steinbeck's ideas of personal growth after incarceration. In Tom Joad's case, his background as a criminal gives him perspective and insight into the life of an unlawful man. This is a title he chooses to continue to hold as he enters into the life of an activist. Jim Casy's time in jail teaches him about the human condition, and this shapes his life goals. He felt these convictions so strongly that he died for them and gave Tom the final push towards the path of activism along the way. Similarly to Tom, Jim Nolan starts out his story recounting his brief time in jail and how it led him to join the Party. Jail set him on the path of activist and showed him how he wanted to live his life. Diving into these characters' backgrounds, migration journeys, and decisions to pursue activism will lead to an understanding of how much people are willing to endure in order to fight for laborers' rights. Their time in jail and prison demonstrate how far people are willing to go to defend the causes they believe in.

Bio

Amy Lu has recently graduated from Arizona State University in December with her bachelor's in English with an emphasis in literature. She has been accepted and plans to attend ASU's law school in the fall of 2026 to explore interests in health, juvenile, and immigration law.

—

Brooklyn McCluskey

Arizona State University

Presentation

Adapting Of Mice and Men Under The Production Code

Abstract

The 1939 film *Of Mice and Men* marked the first major screen adaptation for John Steinbeck's literary works. It was released two years after the successful novel and Broadway play that follows two ranchers searching for work during the Great Depression. When Hollywood came around to adapt *Of Mice and Men*, it proved challenging because of the novel's vulgar language, incest, sex perversion, and ending in which with George walks away unpunished for Lennie's murder. The Production Code guidelines in 1939 specifically stated that the sympathy of the viewers should never fall onto the side of crime and that sex perversion is forbidden. However, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) wanted the film to be released without pushback so they worked for two years making extensive notes and requests to get the film to meet the Code guidelines. This presentation argues that the film *Of Mice and Men* was a result of both accommodation and opposition to the Production Code, due to the influences of creatives involved in the production including Director Lewis Milestone and MPPDA President Will Hays.

Bio

My name is Brooklyn McCluskey and I am currently a junior at Arizona State University studying Film and Media Studies.

Ramisha Nabila

Independent Scholar

Presentation

Steinbeck in Times of War: Negotiating Human Suffering and Social Inequality from the Dust Bowl to Contemporary Crises in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Abstract

In times of war, displacement, and global instability, literature becomes a crucial space for understanding whose suffering is seen and whose is systematically ignored. Drawing on Judith Butler's concepts of precarity and grievability from *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, this paper examines John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as an example to demonstrate how social

and political systems determine which lives are valued and which are considered disposable. The journey of the Joad family demonstrates how the country's prevailing frames of recognition represent migrant workers as "ungrievable lives," undermining their sufferings. This paper argues that the novel's depiction of abandoned lives resonates with today's global conflicts, where displaced families similarly encounter immense distress. Through Butler's theoretical lens, this novel not only represents a historical account but also a powerful depiction of the social inequalities that decide who is protected, who is lost, and whose losses the world refuses to see.

Keywords: War, Displacement, Global Instability, Sufferings, and Social Inequalities.

Bio

Ramisha Nabila is an independent scholar with research interests in cultural studies, disability studies, trauma literature, psychoanalysis, and medical humanities. She is engaged in exploring literature and cultural texts through these interdisciplinary lenses.

Christine Peterson

New Mexico State University/ Dona Ana Community College

Presentation

(Working title) Surveillance isn't new: how to teach, engage and have students critically reflect on commonalities with Steinbeck's times

Abstract

This paper will focus on how to engage students with the literary giant that is John Steinbeck through the use of project-based learning (PBL). This paper details how I connect

"The Grapes of Wrath," "The Winter of Our Discontent," and "Of Mice and Men" to current events. I allow for critical engagement of these texts by having dual credit high school students and rhetoric composition students to create numerous personalized responses to the works including documentary PBLs in which students pick passages to analyze in Steinbeck's works, find corresponding news articles (current) to assess and make connections, map documentary questions for the general public, then film, edit and present their works to the class. In addition to the documentary PBL, other projects for student-advocated social justice are explained.

Bio

Christine Peterson is an assistant professor of English at Dona Ana Community College by night

and a high school English teacher by day. Ms. Peterson is currently pursuing a phd in Rhetoric and Professional Communication at New Mexico State University where her research interests include how identity is shaped by the intersection of religion, folklore and superstition and pop-culture.

Yasuhiro Sakai

Professor Emeritus of English at National Institute of Technology, Yonago College, Tottori, Japan

Presentation

Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday: “A Midautumn-Twilight Dream” from “Gregorian Music” to “Polyphony”

Abstract

In 1930s in America, Steinbeck’s works reflect the background of socialist ideology and the Great Depression in the US. It would be said that he is a great writer with his characteristic way of creating fabulous works based on narrative, mythological and Celtic viewpoint as well as biological/ecological ideas.

Steinbeck himself described Cannery Row as “full of nostalgia,” while regarding Sweet Thursday, he depicted it as “a continuation concerned not with what did happen but with what might have happened.”

As a whole, Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday appear to be reminiscent of the story development of Shakespeare’s masterpiece, A Midsummer-Night’s Dream. In other words, These two works have become a new landmark in Steinbeck's literature.

Furthermore, the description of the “octopus,” the image of the conductor of “an orchestra” which suggests Doc, and the orchestration performed by most of the composers including Mozart who appears in the main story, is the most standard one: a formation using seven instruments with one conductor.

Therefore, at least from a “musical” viewpoint, Steinbeck's unique philosophy of “group man” is well depicted, and that the depiction of “music” seems also to be based on Celtic Culture.

Bio

Graduated from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 1980 (Bachelor's Degree). Professor

Emeritus of English at National Institute of Technology, Yonago College, Tottori, Japan. Published a book titled *The Works of John Steinbeck: In the Magic Light of "Celtic Twilight"* in 2024.

Kevin Sandler

Arizona State University

Presentation

Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*, John Steinbeck, and the Production Code Administration

Abstract

Based on a story by John Steinbeck but whose screenplay was written by a host of writers, Alfred Hitchcock's Oscar-nominated 1944 drama *Lifeboat* is a masterfully composed allegory of the Allied forces during WWII and their need to unite to defeat the Nazi enemy. The film's powerful interplay of suspense and emotion is all that more remarkable for being set entirely on a lifeboat, shot on the backlots of 20th Century Fox. However, the release of *Lifeboat* was not without controversy, much like the adaptations of other works of Steinbeck. The author himself denounced the film for being racist and anti-labor while several prominent critics claimed it to be anti-democratic and pro-Axis. This presentation addresses how these themes alongside concerns of gruesomeness and vulgarity were navigated by the Production Code Administration. Many players, including Code examiners, the Office of War Information, Alfred Hitchcock, and Steinbeck himself, played a significant role in shaping the final product of a unique and complex film.

Bio

Kevin Sandler is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at Arizona State University. He is the author of *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-Rated Movies*, editor of *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, co-editor of *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*, and co-editor of *Hanna and Barbera: Conversations*. His forthcoming books are the single-authored *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* and *The Hanna and Barbera Anthology*.

Sarah Tanner

University of South Carolina

Presentation

(working title) "Eco-spirituality and Frontier Masculinity in Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*"

Abstract

This paper expands on materialist readings of *To a God Unknown*. It traces the cultivation of an eco-spiritual framework as a form of frontier masculinity. Joseph Wayne practices ritual sacrifice as an expression of masculine intimacy which asserts control over the expression of life on his homestead and attempts to ingratiate his masculine subjectivity with the divine. Through this approach to land, uncomfortable affects are mitigated through the act of ritual sacrifice, which affirms a bond with the spiritual qualities of his environment. These practices facilitate an intimacy with death through the perceived safeguards of religious activity. However, instead of alleviating anxieties of environmental crisis—like the drought that threatens to overwhelm the entire Nuestra Señora Valley—Joseph only replicates a hierarchical view of spirituality. This view, while superficially progressive in that it assigns divine potency to the land, ultimately still assumes an imbalance of power that Joseph believes can be remedied through human action. I contend, rather, that assumptions of a hierarchy, divine or otherwise, blind Joseph to the reality of the land’s agency and its fundamental communicability. I ultimately read the collectivity in the Mestizo’s religious response to environmental crisis as a more sustainable model of ecological integration.

Bio

Sarah Tanner is an ABD PH.D. candidate at the University of South Carolina, where she researches American 20th-century literature, affect, and ecocriticism. Her work has been published in journals including *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, *Western American Literature*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Green Letters*, and *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*.

Nick Taylor

San Jose State University

Presentation

Discovering Steinbeck’s Influence on Algerian Novelist Mohammed Dib (1920-2003)

Abstract

A few years ago *Steinbeck Review* published an article by Algerian scholar Dr. Chaker Mohamed ben Ali suggesting “echoes” of Steinbeck’s 1930s labor novels in the work of Algerian novelist Mohammed Dib (1920-2003). He translated a few passages from Dib’s novel *L’incendie* (“The Fire”), published in French in 1954, to illustrate his point. When I moved to France in 2021 for a two-year assignment for the California State University system, Dr. Mohamed ben Ali suggested

a project for my spare time: Would I be interested in collaborating with him on a translation of the whole manuscript of *L'incendie*? Four years later, our translation has been published by an Algerian press, Éditions Sédia. In this paper, I will present some preliminary findings from my analysis of the text and suggest avenues for future scholarship.

Bio

Nicholas P. Taylor is Professor of English & Comparative Literature at San José State University, where he directs the MFA Program in Creative Writing. He is the author of four novels, including *The Disagreement* (Simon & Schuster), *Father Junípero's Confessor* (Heyday), and *The Setup Man* (Doubleday). From 2012 through 2021, Taylor was Director of the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at SJSU, an academic research center dedicated to the life and work of John Steinbeck.

Rebecca Trinh

Green Flash Conservation Science/Blue Marble Space Institute of Science

Presentation

Shifting Tides: How has the Sea of Cortez changed since the era of Steinbeck and Ricketts?

Abstract

John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts' *Sea of Cortez* book pioneered a form of science grounded not only in ecology but in philosophy and a deep curiosity about humanity's place in nature. Their expedition became both a landmark biodiversity survey and a reflection on conflict, interdependence, and the fragility of the natural world. Over 85 years later—amid climate change, overfishing, ecological crisis, and eroding trust in science—their insights feel strikingly relevant. Steinbeck and Ricketts hoped to return to the “ferocious with life” shores of the Sea of Cortez, but war intervened. My 2026 expedition continues the work they never finished. As a marine biologist working in Ricketts' tradition—and someone shaped by Steinbeck's reflections on community and belonging—I've assembled an interdisciplinary team from the U.S. and Mexico to resurvey the same tidepools they documented in 1940. By pairing classic fieldwork with modern eDNA methods, we aim to reveal how biodiversity has shifted and how human identity and coastal ecosystems continue to shape one another. Through scientific publications, a documentary, and a companion book, we hope to revive Steinbeck's call for curiosity and compassion—and explore what his past writings can teach us about building a more resilient future.

Bio

I am a marine biologist with a PhD from Columbia University and a lifelong fan of Steinbeck's fiction and nonfiction writings. As a first generation American, Steinbeck's books helped me navigate life as someone who was made to feel like an outcast or "other". Inspired by Steinbeck's friendship and collaboration with marine biologist Ed Ricketts, I am leading a scientific expedition to retrace their 1940 Sea of Cortez book to quantify how the intertidal biodiversity of the Gulf of California has changed in the last 86 years.

Peter Van Coutren

San Jose State University

Presentation

A view of the Steinbeck Center archives

Abstract

This presentation will offer information on what the Steinbeck Center archives hold, what resources are available online and how the Center can support Steinbeck research.

Bio

Peter is the current archivist at the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University.

Elanur Williams

Independent Scholar

Presentation

Cathy and Alice: Acts of Refusal and Radical Autonomy of Self-Definition in East of Eden

Abstract

In East of Eden, Cathy Ames is often cast as the novel's embodiment of evil; however, her fascination with Alice in Wonderland complicates this view, and offers a lens through which to understand her radical autonomy. As a child, Cathy imagines Alice as a confidante, a fantasy which not only serves as a form of escapism but also reflects Cathy's early recognition of the absurdity of the world around her. Like Alice, Cathy confronts a reality governed by arbitrary rules, where power and virtue are performative and often hypocritical. Cathy refuses to adapt and conform, and as she ages, this refusal becomes a central part of her character. Her acts of

cruelty and manipulation expose moral corruption, and her childhood fantasy of shrinking and disappearing becomes a metaphor for her refusal to be contained by societal narratives. In reclaiming Cathy's connection to Alice, this paper argues her radical autonomy is rooted in an early rejection of the world's moral illusions, making her a figure of profound defiance and self-determination, as well as opens pathways for sexual and reproductive freedom. Through her, Steinbeck's concept of *timshel*—the freedom to choose—finds its most audacious embodiment.

Bio

Elanur Williams has taught in K-12 and Adult Education settings, most recently serving as a GED/Pre-GED instructor at CUNY Lehman College. She holds a BA in English Literature (Concordia University Montreal), MPhil in Children's Literature (Trinity College Dublin), and MEd in Literacy Studies from University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

Kiyoshi Yamauchi

Niimi University

Presentation

Where the Road of John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* and that of Matsuo Basho's *Oku no Hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to Oku) cross

Abstract

Steinbeck's words "once a bum always a bum" is his one of the most quoted phrases. He writes after this, "I fear the disease is incurable. I set this matter down not to instruct others but to inform myself. When the virus of restlessness begins to take possession of a wayward man, and the road away from Here seems broad and straight and sweet, the victim must first find in himself a good and sufficient reason for going. This to the practical bum is not difficult." When a Steinbeck reader comes across the phrase, "I seemed to be possessed by the spirits of wanderlust, and they all but deprived me of my senses" from *Oku no Hosomichi*, a poetry travelogue by the famous Japanese poet Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), the reader has the feeling of *déjà vu*. After the phrase, Basho continues, "and they all but deprived me of my senses. The guardian spirits of the road beckoned."

After Steinbeck's publication of the book, many people travel the road and some wrote travelogues. Similarly, Basho's book is one of the most famous travelogues in Japan, and many travel along his route.

This presentation examines both authors' identities as travelers.

Bio

Kiyoshi Yamauchi is a professor of English at Niimi University in Okayama Prefecture, Japan. He was the 10th President of the John Steinbeck Society of Japan. He is a long-time editor for Steinbeck Studies, the scholarly magazine in English by the John Steinbeck Society of Japan. He has served as the Editor in Chief for almost ten years from 2011 to 2018, and from 2023 on.

Jeff Yeager

Bluefield State University

Presentation

The Weakest Must Be Defended': Re-Reading Of Mice and Men as a Treatise on Human Dignity

Abstract

This analysis looks at *Of Mice and Men* through the lens of Catholic moral theology, particularly in terms of debates surrounding the dignity of the human person. Asserting the value of human dignity has been a major priority in Catholic moral theology under the recent papacies of both Pope Francis and Pope Leo. This analysis looks at Steinbeck's characterization of Lennie by blending moral theology with disability studies, to ultimately argue the novella is a treatise on human dignity ahead of its time. Using a framework that blends thinking from Aristotle and Aquinas, this paper argues that the novella as a treatise on human dignity is a major point in Steinbeck's evolution from the more apolitical *In Dubious Battle* to the polemical *Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck is focused on this concept as the novella frequently focuses on Curley's dog, contrasting the dog with Lennie. The analysis also extends to discussing Candy, Crooks, and Curley's Wife, suggesting in turn that the novella's ultimate point is to assert the dignity of the human person, no matter the person's social or intellectual status.

Bio

Jeff Yeager is an Associate Professor of English & Philosophy at Bluefield State University in Bluefield, WV. Jeff is also the Public Relations Officer for the Steinbeck Society. Lately, Jeff is interested in reading Steinbeck through the lens of moral philosophy.