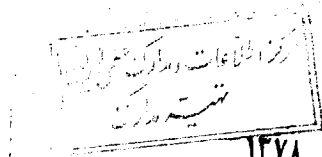


To my dear parents

PCP9A



1358 / 11 / 20

مهدی صالحی (مؤلف)

JOHN STEINBECK: FRIEND OF THE
AMERICAN COMMON MAN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English

The Faculty of Letters and Humanities

Tehran University

In Partial Fulfilment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

by

Mehdi Salehi Esfahani

September 1978

YA
99
V'

VA-
VI
AV

۲۶۲۹۸

JOHN STEINBECK: FRIEND OF THE
AMERICAN COMMON MAN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English
The Faculty of Letters and Humanities
Tehran University

by

Mehdi Salehi Esfahani

Approved by:

Chairman

Ali Zani (advisor)

Oct. 25, '78
Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I. <u>Tortilla Flat</u>	47
Chapter II. <u>In Dubious Battle</u>	63
Chapter III. <u>Of Mice and Men</u>	76
Chapter IV. <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u>	83
Chapter V. <u>Cannery Row</u>	100
Chapter VI. <u>Travels with Charley in Search of America</u>	109
Bibliography.....	120

JOHN STEINBECK: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

John Ernest Steinbeck was born in Salinas Valley, one of California's small central valleys, on February 27, 1902, a valley which runs north and south, paralleling the California coast about thirty miles from the shoreline of the Pacific Ocean. The southern part of Salinas Valley is cut into large fields of vegetables. The town of Salinas is about ten miles from Monterey Bay, which is the county seat, as well as a center of trading and shipping. To the south of Monterey, the town of Pacific Grove is located, where Steinbeck spent the best and happiest days of his life.

John Steinbeck came from a middle class family. His father, John Ernest Steinbeck, was the treasurer of Monterey County, and his mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, taught in the public schools of the area. It was perhaps under her influence that young John became interested in reading early English literary works such as Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur. About this experience, he wrote in 1964 to Mrs. John F. Kennedy;

Since I was nine years old, when my beautiful Aunt Molly gave me a copy of the Morte d'Arthur in Middle English, I have been working and studying this recurring cycle.¹

Besides Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur, young Steinbeck became familiar with some other great literary works such as Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, Flaubert's Madame Bovary, and Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native. Steinbeck was also interested in some important non-fictional books such as The Bible which had a great influence on his literary works. Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath reveals much resemblance to The Bible, for instance, the migration of the farmers from Oklahoma to California is very similar to the exodus of The Hebrew people from Egypt to the Promised Land in The Bible.

In the summer of 1918, at age 16, Steinbeck left his family and began to work on a ranch, in order to support himself. Of this time, later in 1959, he wrote to his friend, Lawrence Hagy:

When I was sixteen I differed with my parents and walked away and got a job on a ranch where they didn't give a damn whether I was sixteen or not. I slept

in the bunk house with all the other hands, got up at four - thirty, cleaned my stall, and saddled or harnessed my horses depending on the job, ate my beef-steak for breakfast and went to work, and the work day was over when you could no longer see. I learned a great deal on that job, things I have been using ever since

In 1919, Steinbeck graduated from Salinas High School, and a year later he entered Stanford University to study marine biology. But he only attended his favorite classes and as a result he didn't graduate. In Stanford, he contributed some poems and short stories to the college paper, The Stanford Spectator. Meanwhile, his financial needs caused him to spend his spare time working on a road - building gang. Then for some time he worked as an assistant chief chemist in a local sugar beet factory. About his experience in this factory he wrote in 1933 to Miss Mc Intosh, his literary agent:

There are some little things that happened in a big sugar mill where I was assistant chief chemist and majordomo (sic) of about sixty Mexicans and Yuakis taken from the jails of northern Mexico.... There was the ex-corporal of Mexican cavalry, whose wife had been stolen by a captain and who was training his baby to be a general so he could get even better women

Later in his life, Steinbeck brought the character of the corporal into his novel TORTILLA FLAT (which will be discussed later in chapter 1).

His sporadic attendance at Stanford and his financial needs resulted in his leaving the university after 5 years in 1925 with no degree. In 1938, in a letter to Arnold Gingrich, editor of Esquire, Steinbeck stated his disliking of higher education:

I think you can understand that my interest in higher education was nonexistent. My parents persuaded and cursed and appealed to my pride. I weakened and I went to college almost frantically unenthusiastic I dragged through three years not bravely but dully. I thought pain could no longer strike and then came the time and I couldn't take it. I didn't graduate.

In 1925, Steinbeck went to New York City, where he tried his hand at several jobs. For some time, he worked as a laborer on the construction of Madison Square Garden. Then his maternal uncle, Joseph Hamilton, helped him get a job as a reporter on The New York American, about which he later recalled:

I worked for the American and was assigned to Federal Court in the old Park Row post office where I perfected my bridge game and did some lousy reporting. I did however perfect a certain literary versatility.

Steinbeck's good memory helped him remember much of what he saw or experienced, and as we will see later, he made a vast use of his learnings and observations.

In the summer of 1926, Steinbeck, quite poor and disappointed by his inability to publish any of his short stories, returned to California as a dockhand via the Panama Canal. In California, Steinbeck found a job as a caretaker of a Lake Tahoe estate in the north east of San Francisco, where he worked until 1928. During this time he wrote his first novel, Cup of Gold, which is a fictionalized biography of a seventeenth-century English buccaneer called Henry Morgan. The book did not sell. Its lack of success was explained to A. Grove Day, in 1929:

There was every excuse for the first being bad, because it was the first I ever did...

This failure didn't have any effect on his enthusiasm for writing. His letter to Carl Wilhelmson, a former classmate at Stanford University, clearly reveals Steinbeck's high hopes for writing:

I have uncovered an unbelievable store of energy in myself. The raps of the last couple of years, i.e.(sic) the failure of the Cup, and the failure of my other things to make any impression,

seem to have no effect on my spirit whatever. For that reason, I have high hopes for myself.

The following years, which brought him fame and success, proved his optimistic view for his future.

In the United States, the year 1929 marked the beginning of the depression, and the initial signs of a severe economic crisis throughout the country. In this time, technology had become very important, and many industrial units had been built. The uncontrolled policy of production resulted in surplus which was followed by a series of disastrous effects. Factories came to a standstill, workers became jobless, and the dollar was greatly devalued. Besides these financial problems, natural disasters still worsened the chaotic situation and intensified the economic depression. Drought in some states such as Oklahoma made the living impossible. Farmers had to sell their farms at very low prices and migrate to California, where according to the handbills thousands of workers were needed to pick fruit. These social and natural factors finally resulted in the crash of the market in 1929 which was followed by the Great Depression in the United States during the thirties. Later results of this economic crisis, such as unemployment, hunger, and diseases were inevitable.

Steinbeck, who was deeply affected by this social upheaval and worried for the Oklahoma farmers' situation, in 1937, accompanied some of them on their way to California, a trip which provided him with a good verbal and behavioral background for some of his best works such as In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath, which were written on the basis of the author's experiences in these years.

In the life of John Steinbeck, the year 1930 is of great importance. For in this year he went to Pacific Grove, where he met Ed Ricketts, a biologist, who became Steinbeck's closest friend until Ricketts' death in 1948. Steinbeck was deeply influenced by the character of Ricketts and also by his philosophy, which is known as a non-teleological view of life, that is, the idea of looking at things as they are instead of what they should be.

Gradually Steinbeck was developing a great interest in Ricketts so that he portrayed Ricketts in several novels. Doc Berton in In Dubious Battle, Doc in Cannery Row, and Doc in "The Snake" show a great resemblance to Ed Ricketts' character. In the case of Doc and his Western Biological Laboratory in Cannery Row, Steinbeck explained, "I used the laboratory and Ed himself in a

book called Cannery Row. Not only did Steinbeck portray Ed Ricketts and the laboratory in his fiction, but also he turned some interesting happenings which had taken place there into his works. For instance, Steinbeck's short story "The Snake" was written on the basis of one of those events. How he came across this story, he thus described:

Mysteries were constant at the laboratory. A thing happened one night which I later used as a short story. I wrote it just as it happened A woman came in one night wanting to buy a male rattlesnake.

In 1932, Steinbeck published The Pastures of Heaven, which is a collection of eleven short stories with no titles. A year before its publication, Steinbeck wrote to Miss McIntosh, his literary agent about the structure of this book:

The manuscript is made up of stories, each one complete in itself, having its rise, climax and ending. Each story deals with a family or an individual. They are tied together only by the common locality and by the contact with the Morans (The principal family in The Pastures of Heaven).³

Steinbeck's familiarity with the suburb of Monterey and its inhabitants helped him to create The Pastures of Heaven. In 1931, in a letter to Mavis McIntosh, Steinbeck explained the reason why he had chosen the title of The Pastures of Heaven for this book:

There is about twelve miles from Monterey, a valley in the hills called Corral de Tierra. Because I am using its people I have named it Las Pasturas del Cielo (sic) (The Pastures of Heaven). (p 42).

Corral de Tierra is the setting of all the stories of this book, but Steinbeck's geographical concentration is mostly on a farm called The Battle Farm.

Steinbeck's next novel was To a God Unknown, which appeared in 1933. The deficiencies of this novel, from the very beginning, made Steinbeck think that it would not be successful. Two years before its publication, he wrote to Mavis McIntosh:

I think I told you in an earlier letter that the imperfections of the Unknown God (this title was later changed to To a God Unknown) had bothered me ever since I first submitted the book for publication. (p 45).

Steinbeck then decided to revise the novel entirely. With the idea that he had finally found out "its faults", he revised it so that the new version bore little resemblance to the original copy. Steinbeck's letter to Amasa Miller in 1932, reveals the changes he had made in the Unknown God.

I have changed the place, characters, time, theme, and thesis and name so maybe it won't be much like the first book. It's good fun though (p. 54).

In writing this novel, Steinbeck was still steadfast in his faith in his creative talent. This was not the only time that he withdrew a novel and revised it. During his life at least three times he withdrew his books simply because he didn't like them. His research on Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur, which lasted more than forty-five years and was never published, and his short story entitled "Dissonant Symphony", which never came out, are two good examples of Steinbeck's steadiness and patience in writing and re-writing.

In 1934, Steinbeck's short story "The Murder" won him the O. Henry Prize, and a year later Steinbeck published Torilla Flat. In this novel he deals with the life of six kind - hearted paisanos who cannot bind themselves to any law. Together they live a very poor life and share everething. Steinbeck in 1933, wrote to his friend, Robert O. Ballou, about this novel:

It is light and I think amusing but true, although no one who doesn't know paisanos would ever believe it (p. 88).

But despite Steinbeck's opinion, people took it seriously, and he was even accused of celebrating stupidity in man.

In 1933, Steinbeck wrote to Mavis McIntosh about this accusation:

I notice that a number of reviewers (what lice they are) complain that I deal particularly in the subnormal and the psychopathic (p. 68).

In spite of all this commotion, according to Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat was a commercial success.

In 1930, Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle appeared. He borrowed the title of his novel from "The Argument" in the first book of Milton's Paradise Lost:

Innumerable force of Spirits armed,
that durst dislike his reign, and
me preferring, His utmost power with
adverse power oppos'd In dubious battle
on the plains of heaven, And shook
his throne. What though the field be
lost? All is not lost; the unconquerable
will, and study of revenge, immortal
hate, And courage never to submit or
yield; and what is else not to be over-
come?⁴

In Dubious Battle is the story of two farm hands, Mac who is a communist, and Jim who has recently joined the Communist Party. They try to persuade the fruit pickers of California to go out on strike and resist against the farm owners who want to pay the least possible wages. The two men use every means they can to work out their plans. However, at last Jim is shot dead while the strike is about to be broken. In this novel like the