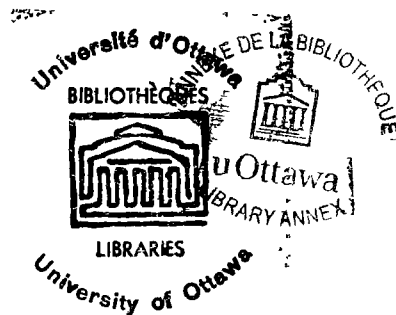


1825

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN THREE OF STEINBECK'S
SHORT NOVELS:
CANNERY ROW, SWEET THURSDAY, AND THE MOON IS DOWN.

By
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Thesis presented to the School of
Graduate Studies of the University of
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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Eileen Overend was born in 1943 in South Kirkby, Yorkshire, England. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Leeds, England, in 1965.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN CANNERY ROW.....	11
II. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN SWEET THURSDAY.....	38
III. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN THE MOON IS DOWN.....	62
CONCLUSION.....	86
A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94
ABSTRACT.	

INTRODUCTION

Steinbeck writes primarily about man as a social animal. At the heart of his fiction lies the assumption that a meaningful understanding of man derives from a consideration of his relationship to society, even when that relationship implies a rejection of society as a whole. In this, Steinbeck is part of the strong American literary movement of the '20's and '30's, encompassing such writers as Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Faulkner.

Daniel B. Weber argues that there have been two main streams of American literature in the twentieth century. "The first ... has concentrated upon descriptions and analyses of the conditions of American life; the second ... has explored the hidden recesses of human nature." ¹ Placing John Steinbeck's work in the first of these streams of writing, he sees the message of Steinbeck's work as: "The individual in opposition to society." ² Interestingly, in

¹Daniel B. Weber, "Society and the American Novel", Diliman Review, 13:4 Oct, 1965, p. 366.

²Ibid., p. 370.

a letter to his publisher, while working on The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck himself summed up his artistic involvement with social man thus: "My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other." ¹

Most critics have stressed Steinbeck's abiding concern with the role of the individual within society. French, for example, comments that "Steinbeck ... has always been preoccupied with the relationship between the individual and the group." ² Hyman, too, is representative of many critics in stating that Steinbeck's work is primarily concerned with individual man in relation to society, and in concluding that "In that sense all his books are social." ³

It was an awareness of the essentially social nature of Steinbeck's writing which first led me to consider the nature of the interdependence of character in his work. What particularly interested me was the relationship between Steinbeck's overall concern for society at large, and his

¹J.H. Jackson, "Introduction", The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, (London: Heinemann, 1953), p. viii.

²Warren French, The Social Novel at the End of an Era, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 46.

³S.E. Hyman, "Some Notes on John Steinbeck", in Steinbeck and His Critics, Ed. Tedlock and Wicker, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 157.

evident preference for, and belief in, the strongly independent individual. The three short novels, Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon is Down, seemed to offer scope for the study of this particular aspect of Steinbeck's work. At the heart of all three novels is a small community under stress, and Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday depict the same community. In the former novel, Cannery Row is shown to be a community essentially without the normal interdependences: a community of strongly individualistic persons, whose only sense of communal identity lies in a vague awareness of being part of Cannery Row, and of Cannery Row being the world. In the latter novel, war has intervened to loosen the social fabric even further. The once seemingly stable Doc is restless, and the community dependent on him has become so too. What few social institutions there were, have now disintegrated completely. In The Moon is Down, by contrast, we witness a small community's response to war. This time the stresses are immediate. They are the stresses and threats caused by enemy occupation of the town. This novel deals with the community's response to those stresses, and in particular, with the emergence of a new sense of its own corporate identity.

Critics have interpreted and defined Steinbeck's fictional concern with social man in widely varying ways. Frederick Bracher, for example, emphasises what he terms

Steinbeck's "biological view of man". He explains that

What appears in Steinbeck's novels is ... a point of view in the literal sense of that phrase - a way of looking at things characteristic of a biologist. It comprises Steinbeck's typical attitude toward the characters in his novels and also the attitudes of some of the characters themselves.¹

Other critics specifically emphasise the relevance of Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking to any consideration of Steinbeck's fiction. Such critics stress the importance of The Log From The Sea of Cortez as a key to understanding Steinbeck's view of man, as depicted in his novels. Russell Brown, for example, argues that "the guiding philosophy behind much of Steinbeck's fiction lies in his espousal of non-teleological thinking ..."² One problem of such an approach is that it leads to an interpretation of character based principally on Steinbeck's objective "'is' thinking",³

¹Frederick Bracher, "Steinbeck and The Biological View of Man", Tedlock and Wicker, p. 184.

²Russell Brown, "The Natural Man in John Steinbeck's Non-Teleological Tales", Ball State University Forum, 7,2, Spring, p. 47.

³Note: Steinbeck himself coins the term "'is' thinking" with reference to his non-teleological philosophy on p. 135 of The Log From the Sea of Cortez, (London: Heinemann, 1971).

and tends to ignore Steinbeck's own authorial role in the novel in determining and controlling the reader's emotional response to character. Thus Brown attempts to defend Steinbeck from charges of sentimentalism by explaining that "He has in many places been referred to as a sentimental writer, but his biological conceptions are the antithesis of sentimentality."¹ The implicit assumption is that Steinbeck must be either sentimental or scientifically objective, but that as artist he cannot be both. Richard Astro emphasises the link between Steinbeck's non-teleological philosophy in The Log From the Sea of Cortez and his novels even more strongly than Russell Brown. In his discussion of Steinbeck's post-war novels he explains that

Generally speaking, Cannery Row serves as a sequel to the Log in that Steinbeck applies to a work of fiction many of the basic principles he formed regarding the structure of life in the Gulf.²

It is interesting that he seems here to be equating

¹Brown, p. 48.

²Richard Astro, "Steinbeck's Post-War Trilogy: A Return to Nature and the Natural Man", Twentieth Century Literature, 16:1970, p. 110.

the creative process of writing Cannery Row with that of writing The Log From The Sea of Cortez. Taking Steinbeck's opening remarks in Cannery Row somewhat at face value, he says:

Even Steinbeck's statement of the means by which he assimilated experiences and recorded life in Cannery Row reminds one of the Log, for the novelist implies that the process of writing Cannery Row resembled his procedure for collecting marine organisms in the Gulf of California. ¹

He thus emphasises what he sees as Steinbeck's 'scientific' approach to writing novels. Harry Slochower extends this line of approach even further in arguing that Steinbeck is better at conveying a sense of the communal animal than he is at creating living individual characters. ² At the other extreme, Lincoln R. Gibbs, also distinguishing between Steinbeck the writer, and Steinbeck the philosopher, argues that "His human sympathies and his artist's perceptions are far better than his lax morality of sex or his confused philosophising." ³

¹Ibid., p. 110

²Harry Slochower, "Towards a Communal Personality", in No Voice Is Wholly Lost, (London: 1946), p. 304.

³Lincoln R. Gibbs, "John Steinbeck: Moralist", in Tedlock and Wicker, p. 100.

Clearly all these critics are drawing distinctions between Steinbeck the scientist and Steinbeck the writer. However, such distinctions really fail to clarify the nature of Steinbeck's fictional expression of his views on man's place in the universe. On the contrary, such distinctions foster seemingly contradictory remarks about Steinbeck's sentimentality on the one hand, and his objectivity on the other. They provide no valid criteria by which to judge the respective merits of the numerous Steinbeck novels which depict the relationship of the individual to the cosmos in terms of his relationship to other men. More than anything, they simply point up two different aspects of Steinbeck: on the one hand his non-teleological thinking, biological view of man, and belief in the communal animal, and on the other, his passionate love for the individual.

Commenting on these two very different aspects of Steinbeck, Walcutt says:

The two great elements of American naturalism - spirit and fact the demands of the heart and the demands of the mind - are Steinbeck's constant pre-occupation; they form the poles of his thought in almost every one of his novels; but they are never united in an Emersonian pattern of oneness where fact is the symbol and expression of spirit and the union of science and mysticism is acknowledged as natural and inescapable. In Steinbeck's work these principles exist in tension, appearing to pull in opposite directions, and the writer deals with them

as if he were confused and doubtful and somewhat surprised to see them emerging from a single phase of experience, as they repeatedly do.¹

This approach to Steinbeck's work is a more fruitful one, for it acknowledges the dichotomy in Steinbeck, and at the same time relates it in a positive way to the literary tradition in which Steinbeck is writing. Henry Golemba's remarks about Steinbeck's particular brand of literary naturalism are perhaps most pertinent of all. Golemba challenges the myth that Steinbeck, or any other writer, can be scientifically objective in the way that Steinbeck clearly intended to be in The Log From The Sea of Cortez.

As he points out:

Merely observing is not an erroneous approach simply because it does not champion a purpose for existence, but because of an inherent contradiction. An author cannot adopt this approach and avoid being one-sided.

John Steinbeck is such an author. He seeks to portray patterns and not purposes of reality. He believes that in this he is being neutral, when in fact he is presenting a definite philosophy. His 'mere observation' proves the weakness of the individual and the hopelessness of the future. His 'impartial vision' is highly partisan. In this

¹Charles Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 258.

particular attempt to escape the literary fallacy, Steinbeck inadvertently becomes one-sided. ¹

This goes a long way to explain the 'sentimentalism' earlier critics saw as a weakness in Steinbeck, and which they felt to be at odds with his biological view of man. Woodburn Ross neatly sums it up this way:

...despite his scientific predilections and his expressed objections to other than purely descriptive thinking, Steinbeck soon assumes an attitude toward the objective world which is almost mystical. ²

Hugh Holman makes essentially the same point when he says:

I think we have been wrong about Steinbeck. We have let his social indignation, his verisimilitude of language, his interest in marine biology lead us to judge him as a naturalist...Steinbeck is more nearly a twentieth century Dickens of California, a social critic with more sentiment than science or system, warm, human, inconsistent, occasionally angry but more often delighted with the joys that life on its lowest levels presents. ³

¹Henry Golemba, "Steinbeck's Attempt to Escape the Literary Fallacy", Modern Fiction Studies, 15: Summer, 1969, p. 231.

²Woodburn Ross, "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest", Tedlock and Wicker, p. 169.

³Hugh Holman, "A Narrow-Gauge Dickens", New Republic, 130, 7 June, 1954, p. 20.

This study of the interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon is Down, will therefore be primarily concerned with Steinbeck's portrayal of the complex social interrelationship of individual and communal man in the three novels, and with the two poles of thought central to his vision of mankind. As Fontenrose says:

Biology and myth provide the two poles of Steinbeck's world, tide pool and paradise. He has built a hierarchy of organisms from the individual creature up through ever larger group organisms to the whole life and the world. We start with pure biology and end with pure myth. ¹

Steinbeck's own assertion that:

I believe that man is a double thing - a group animal and at the same time an individual. And it occurs to me that he cannot successfully be the second until he has fulfilled the first. ²

lies at the heart of this study.

¹Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1963), p. 139.

²Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 129.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN CANNERY ROW

The opening lines of Cannery Row leave us in no doubt that the novel is to be about Cannery Row: "Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream..."¹ Nevertheless, as Steinbeck recognises, the great problem is to convey the totality of a dynamic life form without destroying it in the process: "How can the poem, and the stink, and the grating noise, the quality of light, the tone, the habit and the dream - be set down alive?"(p.5) Steinbeck suggests in the introductory chapter that perhaps the best way to convey the essence of Cannery Row will be "to open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves."(p.5) These stories are to be about the individuals who make up the community of Cannery Row.

Inherent in such an approach, however, is a paradox. A community is composed of many separate individuals, but a community is, by definition, a single entity, by virtue of being the sum of its separate parts. It is clear from the

¹John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, (London:Heron Books, 1971), p. 3. (All subsequent page references given are from this edition, and will appear in brackets after the quotation.)

opening chapter that Steinbeck is aware of this dichotomy. His Cannery Row is many disparate things, yet each list of the characteristic and disparate sights, sounds, smells, and inhabitants also serves to crystallise the essential corporate nature of the Row. For example, Cannery Row is "a poem, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream." (p.3) It is also:

...the gathered and scattered, tins and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk-heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky-tonks, restaurants and whore-houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flop-houses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,' by which he meant Everybody. (p.3)

In addition, early in this introductory chapter, Steinbeck delineates what Cannery Row is not. He makes it clear that his Cannery Row is not the world of the canneries with their hustle and bustle and noise, for, after the day's work at the cannery is done, "Cannery Row becomes itself again - quiet and magical. Its normal life returns." (p.4) Steinbeck thus establishes the normalcy of the Row to be the quiet and the magic. The cameo sketches which follow capture the essence of the characteristic physical and emotional atmosphere of the Row:

The bums who retired in disgust under the black cypress trees come out to sit on the rusty pipes in the vacant lot. The girls from Dora's emerge for a bit of sun if there is any. Doc strolls from the Western Biological Laboratory and crosses the street to Lee Chong's grocery for two quarts of beer. Henri the painter noses like an Airedale through the junk in the grass-grown lot for some part or piece of wood or metal he needs for the boat he is building. Then the darkness edges in and the street light comes in front of Dora's - the lamp which makes perpetual moonlight in Cannery Row. Callers arrive at Western Biological to see Doc, and he crosses the street to Lee Chong's for five quarts of beer. (p.4)

As Ward Moore notes:

It is significant that the reader is never taken inside a cannery or introduced to even minor characters directly involved with fish-packing, with wages and work, unions and families. In a proletarian bohemia Steinbeck chose to portray the ultra-bohemian fringe: the bums, whores, and the two professional men - the merchant Lee Chong, rapacious and benevolent, with a tightly symbiotic relationship to the Row, and Doc, whose presence is socially and economically fortuitous.¹

Our main concern is with the interdependence of character and thus with the constituent parts of the community of Cannery Row. However, the two views of Cannery Row as the whole and as its constituent parts are complementary and integral to the novelist's single purpose of portraying

¹Ward Moore, "Cannery Row Revisited: Steinbeck and The Sardine", Nation, 179, Oct. 16, 1954, p. 326.

a community. They are not mutually exclusive. As Peter Lisca has pointed out:

Concerning this problem of the role of the individual in Steinbeck's work there is a paradox. For while many of his novels concern themselves with men primarily as mystical, social, psychological, or biological unit-protagonists, rather than individuals per se, his thought as a whole rejects the values of the group and asserts the primacy of the individual.¹

The paradoxical relationship of the individual and the group may profitably be seen as related to the more basic tension in Steinbeck's work: that between the philosopher-biologist and the artist. In Cannery Row the philosopher-biologist provides the basic allegorical myth which structures the novel as a whole, the artist provides the human stories of the Row. The allegorical interchapters, with their authorial comment on the whole society of the Row, and by extension, on the greater society of Mankind, thus provide a symbolic framework to the largely realistic episodic stories which concern the doings of the individual members of the community. Peter Lisca's conclusions about the structure of Of Mice And Men would seem equally valid with regard to Cannery Row:

¹Lisca, p. 108.

The 'real' meaning of the book is neither in the realistic action nor in the levels of allegory. Rather it is in the pattern which informs the story both on the realistic and allegorical levels.¹

This is certainly true, for example, of Steinbeck's first description of community activity, which focusses on gossip. On a realistic level gossip is the power of the spoken word to distort. At a symbolic level, "The Word" imposes a oneness on the amorphousness of this community of bums, whores, and social outsiders:

Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas. (p.15)

Steinbeck's method throughout the novel is to adopt a benevolently amused and often gently ironic stance with regard to community activities. Typical is his depiction of the community's interest in the flag-pole skater at Holman's Department Store, which also centres on gossip. Stressing the general interest in the event, he tells us that, "everyone knew he didn't come down", and also that "Everyone in the town was more or less affected by the

¹Lisca, p. 142.

skater." (pp.109-10) Steinbeck thus simultaneously exposes the community's real interest in the skater in an entertaining way, and highlights the rather comic nature of communal activity in Cannery Row.

In addition, Steinbeck at various times clearly delineates the community as a whole by consciously providing his community with external points of reference. For example, Lee Chong's foreignness is "warped and woven into a fantastic pattern" by the gossip of the Row and he becomes "more than a Chinese grocer". (p.15) Similarly, the old Chinaman is never quite accepted by the citizens of the Row: "People, sleeping, heard his flapping shoe go by and they awakened for a moment. It had been happening for years but no one ever got used to him." (pp.23-24) In the same way, "the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them," (p.16) is contrasted with the essential sanity of the Row, as typified by Mack and the boys, who are "the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces." (p.16)

Just as Steinbeck has clearly delineated the essential social nature of Cannery Row by contrasting it favourably with Monterey, so, when he describes the Row at length, he chooses to depict it at its "time of magic", infusing the whole with "a silvery light", and emphasising the unity of

emotional tone, which makes this hour "a time of great peace, a deserted time, a little era of rest". (p.88) Even the annoyed watchman causes only the slightest ripple on the contented surface of Cannery Row, unified in its "hour of the pearl". (p.88)

Steinbeck's depiction of the Row as a whole may be summed up as essentially a glorification of it, albeit at times a wryly humorous one. His widely separated glimpses of the social nature of the community as a whole are closely integrated with, and complementary to, the emotional push of the episodes delineating the social relationships of individual members of the community. In particular, the novel moves swiftly and purposefully to a final climax because of the skilful way in which Steinbeck has related individual episodes to the communal endeavour to give Doc "a party he does get to." (p.14) A drive is imparted to the plot from the point at which a community spirit is born out of Mack and the boys' first abortive attempt to give Doc a party. Steinbeck emphasises that the "black gloom" of the Palace Flophouse is partly a result of the group's sense of personal failure, but far more a result of their consciousness of social disfavour. "Mack and the boys were under a cloud and they knew it, and they knew they deserved it. They had become social outcasts." (p.136) The community of Cannery Row thus has a common concern and cause for despair, and true

to form this concern is expressed through gossip. "The story ran through the Bear Flag. It was told in the canneries. At 'La Ida' drunks discussed it virtuously." (p.136)

Personal gloom becomes a community misery and individuals are united in a series of quite separate disasters: Sam Malloy fights with his wife, the bouncer at the Bear Flag gets into trouble with the law for injuring a drunk, a group of virtuous ladies forces the closure of the Bear Flag for two full weeks, causing loss of business at a potentially very profitable time of the year, Doc has to get a bank loan, Elmer Rechatliff loses his legs, a storm causes the loss of four fishing vessels, and Darling falls ill.

Equally, the relief from gloom is expressed in terms of a communal recovery. The improvement in Darling is described as "a crack ... in the wall of evil." (p.145) The recovery of the vessels and the reopening of the Bear Flag are seen as the first stage in breaking away this wall of evil. Doc recovers his good humour, Lee Chong forgives Mack and the boys, and writes off the frog dept, and finally, Dora comes up with the proposal for the party. Steinbeck describes how this community happiness grows: "Now a kind of gladness began to penetrate into the Row, and to spread out from there." (p.153) Identifiable manifestations of this are Doc's successes with the ladies, and the puppy's

return to health. Steinbeck describes this happiness variously as "the benignant influence" which "crept like gas through the Row" (p.154), and as a physical force: "Perhaps some electrical finder could have been developed so delicate that it could have located the source of all this spreading joy and fortune." (p.154)

In the midst of the joy arise the community's plans for a party for Doc. Steinbeck's explanation is that these are the product of a community awareness rather than the brainchild of any one person:

The knowledge of conviction about the party for Doc was no sudden thing. It did not burst out full blown. People knew about it, but let it grow gradually, like a pupa in the cocoons of their imaginations." (p.154)

He carefully plots the course of the growth of this knowledge. Whilst the Flophouse Gang are obviously the initiators of the idea of the party, being "the stone dropped in the pool, the impulse which sent ripples to all of Cannery Row and beyond", nevertheless, "People didn't get the news of the party - the knowledge of it just grew up in them." (p.163) So, each member of the community works singlemindedly towards the party. All are concerned about the problem of gifts for Doc. Chapter XXII ends with a certain tenseness as we are told that "the first excite-

ment was gone from the Row and its place was taken by a deadly cumulative earnestness." (p.168)

This cumulative community earnestness can only move on to a climax, and the intervening episode of Frankie's theft of the clock only staves it off temporarily. Chapter thirty, the climactic point of the novel, is a celebration of the community's pride in itself, as personified in Doc. The whole community is united by their love for Doc, and all the members of the community are present. Thus, although Steinbeck professes to be interested in letting "the stories crawl in by themselves", his interest in the community as a whole helps to define and control the structural movement and pace of the novel, and it also serves as a symbolic framework for the loosely episodic stories of the individual inhabitants of the Row.

Steinbeck the artist, as opposed to Steinbeck the philosopher, is concerned with convincing us emotionally of the characteristic quality of his community of bums and whores, and his emphasis in setting down this quality being on Man the social animal, the individual stories in the novel centre on social behaviour. Furthermore, his novel being a clear indictment of certain aspects of contemporary society as he saw it, the aesthetic success of the novel rests on Steinbeck's ability to make the reader accept the norms of social behaviour and social interdependence in

Cannery Row, and thus become emotionally convinced of his allegorical truths about "The Virtues, The Graces, The Beauties, (p.16) and "Our Father who art in Nature". (p.17) He succeeds in this by creating a community in which the institutional social roles are taken over by a relatively small group of characters whom he makes the object of our emotional involvement and approval.

Within the stories, the emotional appeal of Steinbeck's community lies in the convincing individualism of the main protagonists' way of life. Foremost among these is Doc, who is the focal point of the community and central to the thematic concern of the novel. Doc not only functions as father-figure to a large 'family', but also provides the main financial support to the Row, and is the Row's sole teacher, doctor, psychologist, and provider of culture. Throughout, he is presented in a sympathetic light. He listens patiently to Hazel's news, makes him feel important and boosts his self-confidence. On the other hand, whilst he is less protective towards Mack than he is towards Hazel, lashing out at him physically on finding the shambles in his laboratory, and bluntly direct about past broken promises, he is nevertheless understanding enough to absolve Mack of the responsibility for paying off the damage to the laboratory. Mack, for his part, confesses to Doc as he does to no one else, the sad reality behind the

bombast of his life as the leader of the gang; the way in which, as he puts it, "Ever'thing I done turned sour... Same thing ever' place 'til I just turned to clowning. I don't do nothin' but clown no more. Try to make the boys laugh." (pp.128-9). To the gang as a whole, Doc is an object of admiration and love, "a hell of a nice fella", (p.43) for whom they plan to give "a party you wouldn't be ashamed of." (p.45) Through everything they have a complete, confidently childlike trust in Doc. They even turn to him in their hour of need, when Darling is sick, despite the prevailing coolness between the gang and Doc, as a result of the first disastrous party.

Doc also acts as fatherly comforter to two men who are misunderstood outsiders even in this community, Henri, and Frankie. In his conversation with Hazel, Doc defends Henri against Hazel's charges, tolerantly explaining that Henri is "Nuts about the same way we are, only in a different way." (p.36) Henri himself, aware of Doc's understanding, turns to him for an explanation of his terrible nightmares. Doc feeds, clothes, and cares for Frankie, who becomes his slave, and fixes his total affection on Doc in a desperate and despairing love. Doc's compassion is tragically the motivation for the impulse to steal, which finally closes an institutional door on Frankie's life of freedom.

All these members of Doc's 'family' may be said to draw comfort from their dependence on him, and Steinbeck has made these interrelationships a recurrent pattern in the novel. As Prentiss Bascom Wallis has pointed out in his admirable study of the family as symbolic pattern in the work of Steinbeck:

In Steinbeck's fiction, the central tension is provided by a group of people attempting to live together in close harmony. Often, these people are a literal family related by blood ties ... As often as not, however, the 'Family' consists of people not biologically related.¹

Whilst no one familial relationship with Doc is explored in depth or at length in Cannery Row, each contributes to the mosaic of social interdependence, and is woven closely into the episodic development of the novel.

Financially too, Doc's role is essentially that of a giver. For example, Doc in the end indirectly finances his own party, for even the money the gang raises towards the party comes from Doc's payment for the frogs. As Doc himself ruefully reflects, "Doc's dealings with Mack and the boys had always been interesting but rarely profitable to Doc." (p. 53) Even Mack, in a flash of pene-

¹Prentiss Bascom Wallis, Jr., John Steinbeck: The Symbolic Family, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, the University of Kansas, 1966), p. 7.

trating honesty, has momentary regrets about the relationship between the gang and Doc. Hazel's protest that the gang's motives are right-hearted, draws Mack's response, "I'd just like to give him something when I didn't get most of it back." (p.79) Quite apart from his generosity to individuals, Doc brings money into the community through his business, and it is his money which supports not only Mack and the gang, and various waifs and strays like Frankie, but which helps keep Lee Chong's business moderately solvent.

Doc is also the true educator of Cannery Row, "the fountain of philosophy, and science, and art." (p.28) He educates Dora's girls in classical music, Lee Chong in the Chinese classical literature of Li Po, Henri in ancient Egyptian papyrus illustrations in the Book of the Dead, and the children of the Row in everything: "Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon - and his sympathy had no warp." (p.29) Social interdependence in the sphere of education thus centres on the figure of Doc. The Row is dependent on an individual rather than on institutions or a formal system. In any case, the cultural life of Cannery Row is almost non-existent in the sense that there are none of the usual manifestations of culture such as theatres, concerts, or art galleries. However, a shared aesthetic experience occurs in the climactic emotional moment of Doc's

party, when Doc reads the poem 'Black Marigolds' to his guests, and we are told that "a little world sadness slipped over all of them. Everyone was remembering a lost love, everyone a call." (p.183) It is a moment of rare beauty in the community life of the Row, and it too is brought about by Doc.

Another example of Steinbeck's skilful manipulation of the role of Doc is in regard to Doc's role as doctor of medicine to the Row. Steinbeck's single reference to the medical profession in the novel is a damning indictment of its professional ethics. During the flu epidemic the doctors of Monterey are run off their feet. However, Steinbeck's ironical tone makes it clear that priority of treatment is based on financial solvency rather than on medical need: "The medical profession was very busy, and besides, Cannery Row was not considered a very good financial risk." (p. 95) By implication, the doctors do not even always come in case of emergency, for we are told that when phoned by Doc, "Sometimes one came, if it seemed to be an emergency." (p.96) Steinbeck emphasises the way in which Doc, by contrast, provides the care and leadership the Row needs. He is both counsellor and psychological support as well as doctor, and in this he is helped by Dora and her girls. Steinbeck makes it clear that no blame attaches to Doc for practising medicine, although in fact he has no right to do

so: "It was not his (Doc's) fault that everyone in the Row came to him for medical advice." (p.16) Paradoxically, Doc, who strictly speaking is a quack, is thus shown to be ethically and practically superior to the properly qualified doctors of Monterey. Steinbeck also makes it clear that Doc's role as a doctor of medicine is closely related to the respect in which he is held in the community, and other little incidents throughout the novel illustrate this. Mack's unsolicited testimonial to the niceness of Doc naturally includes the fact of Doc's generosity, but also the fact that when Mack cut himself, Doc put on a new bandage every day. On another occasion, as a preamble to negotiations over the contract to get Doc some frogs, Mack tells Doc of Phyllis Mae's infected fist and arm, and Doc promises to take her some sulfa. On yet another occasion, Steinbeck emphasises the fact that all the community feels indebted to Doc thus: "Take the girls over at Dora's. All of them had at one time or another gone over to the laboratory for advice or medicine or simply for unprofessional company." (p.163)

The author here, as elsewhere, clearly guides our emotional response to Doc. This is as true in his descriptions of Doc's appearance as in his descriptions of his actions. He tells us variously that "his face is half-Christ and half satyr and his face tells the truth", (p.28)

and that "He lived in a world of wonders, of excitement. He was concupiscent as a rabbit and gentle as hell. Everyone who knew him was indebted to him." (p.29) Our emotional approval of Doc stems mainly from his role in the story. However, Steinbeck has neatly balanced authorial comment and character action throughout the novel, so that the former is not intrusive, but subtly directive.

Steinbeck's other main protagonists also display an appealingly individualistic approach to their social lives, and they too, are presented in such a way as to evoke our emotional involvement and approval. The other important group, the Flophouse gang, distinctly on the outer edge of what is generally thought of as normal society, behaves in many ways as an ideal family. The gang, like Doc's larger 'family', comprises a group of people totally unrelated by blood, and Steinbeck describes them as "a little group of men who had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment." (p.12) Like Doc's 'family', they function efficiently as a social unit, being drawn together by mutual ties stronger even than those of blood kinship. In fact, as Steinbeck draws them, they could be said to be one of the most stable social units in the Row. It is evident that Steinbeck intends us to view sympathetically many aspects of their approach to life, in particular their uncomplicated demands on the world, and

their capacity to derive satisfaction from the simple joys such as food and drink and warm companionship. Steinbeck draws a comparison between their life and that of most people, clearly showing that of the majority in an unfavourable light:

Whereas most men in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their targets, Mack and his friends approached contentment casually, quietly, and absorbed it gently."
(p.12)

Unusual though the Flophouse setting is, and unconventional though its family of inhabitants is, Steinbeck clearly conveys the strong sense of family pride in the Palace Flophouse, which in time turns it into a home:

With the great stove came pride, and with pride, the Palace became home. Eddie planted morning glories to run over the door and Hazel acquired some rather rare fuchsia bushes planted in five gallon cans which make the entrance formal and a little cluttered. Mack and the boys loved the Palace and they sneered at unsettled people who had no house to go to and occasionally in their pride they brought a guest home for a day or two. (p.41)

Family pride and emotional warmth characterise the Flophouse, whilst narrowmindedness and uncertainty characterise the more conventional families of the Row, typified in Steinbeck's sharp allusion to "married spinsters, whose

husbands respect the home but don't like it very much."(p.18) Steinbeck later consciously juxtaposes the simple life of good companionship led by Mack and the boys with the outwardly socially respectable, but cold, family life of the Captain and his wife. When Mack and the boys look round the captain's kitchen, they assess the captain's absent wife to be one of the type of women who "knew that they (Mack and the boys) were the worst threats to a home, for they offered thought and companionship as opposed to neatness, order, and properness." (p.88) On the other hand, the group's communal undertakings, such as the great expedition to catch frogs, are characterised by this very companionship. From the first, the trip is marked by happiness. Gay's mechanical genius gets Lee Chong's truck started and even the later breakdown of the truck causes only a momentary hiatus. Steinbeck surrounds the gang with an ambience of good fortune, for "Luck blossomed from the first", in the highly fortuitous shape of "a dusty Rhode Island red rooster."(p.72) Landscape and gang are equally blessed. The Carmel "has everything a river should have", and "Mack and the boys come to this place happily. It was perfect." (p.13) As they drink, conversation turns happily on their own life, and they muse on the troubles and insecurities of married life. By contrast, they themselves are "warm and fed and silent". Mack turns the conversation to Doc, and his burst of

generous sentiment is neatly summed up in Jones' response to Hazel's observation that Mack could have been the president of the U.S. if he had wanted. "What could he do with it if he had it? ... There wouldn't be no fun in that."

(p.83)

At other points in the novel Steinbeck's mellow prose conveys the conviviality born of the gang's capacity to live for the moment, in a companionable shared contentment of food and drink, and in making leisurely plans for the party for their friend Doc. "They sat in the afternoon, smoking, digesting, considering, and now and then having a delicate drink from the jug." (p.118) Together they savour Mack's vision of the party.

They leaned back and considered the thing. And in their minds the laboratory looked like the conservatory at the Hotel del Monte. They had a couple more drinks just to savour the plan. (p.118-19)

Within the aesthetic framework of the novel, we accept the glorification of the way of life of Mack and the gang, as we do that of Doc, and even emotionally approve the gang's negative work ethic. We do so because of Steinbeck's skilful control of our emotional response to his characters' social behaviour. His skill in manipulating these symbolic characters in such a way that they become emotionally 'real'

within the context of the novel lies in the way he exploits the credibility gap between emotion and intellect. His controlled and often ironic characterisation is in fact a highly successful resolution of the tension between the philosopher-biologist and the artist. The hilarious doings of the gang are tempered by the ironic stance of the author and so our emotional approval of the gang is tempered by intellectual reservations. For example, the effectiveness of the affectionate description of Gay's competent work on the truck rests on a series of delicate ironic tensions which cause the reader to be aware of the comic contrast between the gang's present endeavours and their general antipathy to work, of the comic contrast between the state of the truck and the proportionate effort being expended on it, and of the irony implicit in the statement that Gay "could have worked in the canneries all the time had he wished." (p.61) A similar irony underlies Mack's rationalisation as to why he will not work for the Hediondo Cannery, even to make money for Doc. Within the context of the novel, the speech is emotionally appealing, if intellectually unconvincing.

'No', said Mack quickly, 'We got good reputations and we don't want to spoil them. Every one of us keeps a job for a month or more when we take one. That's why we can always get a job when we need one. S'pose we take a job for a day or so - why we'll

lose our reputation for sticking. Then if we needed a job there wouldn't be nobody have us.' (p.45)

There is equal force of appeal in the fact that Hughie and Jones go out and get a job only when they are really miserable, after the first unsuccessful party for Doc.

In a more general sense, the gang is even portrayed as moral, at least within its own community. Despite their excursions outside the community to beg, borrow, or steal, within it the gang members have a scrupulous code of behaviour. It is this code which Lee Chong takes into account when negotiating the deal over the Flophouse. In fact, throughout the novel, the work ethic is scorned, even ridiculed, and the nature of the economic interdependence of the characters is also a direct reflection of this. For example, only Doc has anything like a steady income, and he, most of all, distinguishes between a free and easy life style and that typically associated with a so-called steady job. He commends the life style of Mack and the boys to his friend with the words, "All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean." (p.138) Thus, throughout the novel, social success and its attendant economic success are equated with personal failure. Steinbeck has Doc expound the paradox at the heart of all the

social relationships in the novel:

'It has always seemed strange to me', said Doc, 'The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system, and those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success.' (p. 140)

Even Dora, the Madam, typifies those traits which are "the concomitants of failure in our system". Her rule over the Bear Flag is benignly matronly. She does not turn old whores out of doors, but looks after and feeds them, and also takes care that her girls are well protected. Like Doc, she too is a giver, for whilst she draws in money from her local customers and from her clientele of cannery workers, soldiers, and fishermen, she lays out large sums of money for community charity, during the Depression pays many people's grocery bills, and spontaneously offers her help to the victims of the flu epidemic. Steinbeck ironically contrasts the demonstrably charitable behaviour of Dora the social outcast, with that of "a group of high-minded ladies in the town" who "demanded that the dens of vice must close to protect American manhood." (p.142) the Author's standpoint on this type of morality is made abundantly clear in the very next statement. "This happened about once a year in the dead period between the Fourth of July and the

County Fair." (p.142) The motivation of these ladies is ironically attributed to the fact that "It had been a dull summer and they were restless." (p.142)

It is interesting to note that in this Steinbeck drew closely on his own experience of the real life Cannery Row. The social values of the novel parallel closely his own concept of an ideal community, as exemplified in the Cannery Row of Ed Ricketts, so lovingly described in the preface to The Log From The Sea of Cortez. In this preface, for example, he contrasts the Madam, "a very great woman", to the 'virtuous' citizenry, for whom he clearly had very little time. "The Madam", he says, "was beloved and trusted by all who came in contact with her, except those few whose judgement was twisted by a limited virtue." ¹

All the major protagonists of the novel are depicted in a heroic light, despite their ostensibly anti-social lives as itinerant scientist, bums, scroungers, and whores, respectively. In their social behaviour they are morally superior to the members of the 'other' respectable community which exists only on the shadowy rim of Steinbeck's Cannery Row. Respectable citizens are relegated to minor roles in the novel. For example, we are accorded only the

¹John Steinbeck, Preface to The Log From The Sea of Cortez, (London: Heron Books, 1971), p. XXVII.

merest glimpse of the dignitaries in charge of local municipal affairs, and that is on the occasion of the Fourth of July Procession. The local police figure once on the occasion of the arrest of Frankie, and once, in highly comic light, participating in Doc's party, when they behave in a way most unbecoming to respectable citizens. There are no truly traditional family groups in the novel. Even those family groups bound together by legal ties, such as those of Lee Chong, the Malloys, and the Talbots, play only a very minor role in the story, and the last two named are in any case far from traditional in their social behaviour. Warren French saw the attack on respectability as a main theme in Steinbeck's work, and in writing of Cannery Row he said, "The enemy Steinbeck attacks - the destructive force that preys on the world - is, as usual in his novels, respectability." ¹

Examination of the social interdependences of character in Cannery Row has thus shown one salient feature to be an inversion of the normal patterns of social behaviour, and it is important to recognise that a major facet of the novel is the author's indictment of certain aspects of contemporary society as he saw it. The social interdependences of Cannery Row are portrayed by Steinbeck

¹Warren French, John Steinbeck, (New York:Twayne, 1961), p.120.

as the last resort against the "mangled craziness" of life in contemporary society. Throughout the novel he emphasises the highly personal nature of the successful social interdependences in Cannery Row. These interdependences are characterised by Mack and the boys who "avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose, while a generation of trapped, poisoned and trussed up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals bums." (pp.16-17)

Ultimately, however, Cannery Row must be judged successful on the basis of Steinbeck's ability to make the reader accept the norms of social behaviour in Cannery Row, and become emotionally convinced of his truths about "The Virtues, The Graces, The Beauties". The key to this is Steinbeck's successful resolution of what Peter Lisca has called "that nice tension between mind and heart, science and poetry, which underlies all his successful fiction." ¹ The conflict in Steinbeck, between the scientist's theories of group-man and the artist's love for the individual is neatly resolved in this novel. Steinbeck achieves structural tensioning by the organic fusion of allegorical interchapter and realistic episode. At the same time he successfully maintains sufficient aesthetic distance from

¹Lisca, p. 292.

his characters to exploit the credibility gap between the reader's intellect and emotion. Allegorical characters thus attain an emotional reality within the aesthetic framework of the novel.

Steinbeck has artfully counterpoised characters, and communities in Cannery Row, and his thematic concern with Man the social animal, permeates into our consciousness subtly yet persistently. He has portrayed credible individuals through carefully realised patterns of behaviour. The novel is a rich mosaic of the complexities of human social behaviour, and Steinbeck engages our sensibilities, and through them our intellect, by the skilful manipulation and juxtaposition of action and comment.

CHAPTER TWO:

INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN SWEET THURSDAY

The Prologue to Sweet Thursday clearly links that novel with the earlier Cannery Row, as the opening statement made by Mack indicates: "One night Mack lay on his bed in the Palace Flophouse and he said, 'I ain't never been satisfied with that book Cannery Row. I would of went about it different.'" ¹ However, in the Prologue we are also given a firm indication that we may expect the authorial approach to be quite different from that in Cannery Row. A quick glimpse at the chapter headings confirms that the author appears to have followed Mack's advice about setting aside Hoopedoodle, and also that the author is more consciously directive, as in chapter headings such as, "There's a Hole in Reality Through Which We Can Look If We Wish". On the other hand, the first chapter of the novel seems to confirm the continuing link with Cannery Row in that it charts what has happened to the main protagonists since we last met them in Cannery Row.

These contradictory impressions are indicative of a

¹John Steinbeck, Sweet Thursday, (London: Heron Books, 1971) p. 197. (All subsequent page references are from this edition, and will appear in brackets after the quotation.)

basic thematic conflict in the novel. Whilst the community is evidently not the main theme in the same way as it was in Cannery Row, nevertheless Steinbeck retains a thematic concern with many of the same features of social behaviour we noted in our study of Cannery Row. Steinbeck's emphasis in Sweet Thursday has shifted from the community to the individual in that the central narrative thread traces Doc's restlessness and his love affair with Suzy. Nonetheless the protagonists are, as in Cannery Row, highly social creatures retaining many of the same social roles and social inter-dependences of that novel. Furthermore, authorial comment in Sweet Thursday makes it clear that the community of Cannery Row is to be regarded as a microcosmic metaphor in this novel as it was in Cannery Row. For example, at the beginning of the interchapter "Sweet Thursday (1)," Steinbeck juxtaposes the build-up to the events of Sarajevo, Munich, Stalingrad, Valley Forge and Pearl Harbour, with the build-up to the events of Sweet Thursday on Cannery Row. He thus symbolically identifies, by association, the doings of the lesser human community with that of the greater and universal human social group. Thus the statement "There is no doubt that forces were in motion on that Thursday in Cannery Row," (p.315) becomes a symbolic and not merely a factual statement. Similarly, the description of the changes in Cannery Row and its citizens at the beginning

of "Hooptedoodle (1)" is also to be understood at the symbolic as well as the factual level. Steinbeck associatively links the "prodigies and portents" (p.215) of the winter and spring with the changes in "Cannery Row and its denizens." (p.216)

Steinbeck's depiction of the communal group throughout the novel is altogether very similar to that in Cannery Row. Once more, Steinbeck's often symbolic portrayal of the communal group shows an awareness of the paradox of the relationship of the group whole and the individual part. Once more, the biologist's concept of the group animal provides the explanatory metaphor:

To a casual observer Cannery Row might have seemed a series of self-contained and selfish units, each functioning alone with no reference to the others. There was little visible connection between La Ida's, the Bear Flag, the grocery, (still known as Lee Chong's Heavenly Flower Grocery), the Palace Flophouse, and Western Biological Laboratories. The fact is that each was bound by gossamer threads of steel to all the others - hurt one, and you aroused vengeance in all. Let sadness come to one, and all wept. (p.253)

However, this metaphor is in no way a central image in the way the tide pool metaphor was in Cannery Row. In Cannery Row, aesthetic unity derived from a single theme. As Steinbeck's subject was the community itself, the episodic stories about the individual members of the com-

munity were directly related to authorial comment on the group-animal. In Sweet Thursday, however, the biologist-philosopher's concern with the communal animal is often, in conflict with the emotional push of the strong narrative plot-line which traces the love affair of Doc and Suzy. In the context of Sweet Thursday, the recurrent and often symbolically charged authorial comment on the society of Cannery Row as a whole is thus an aesthetically divisive, rather than a structurally unifying, literary device.

The above description of the Row as a group animal quoted from the beginning of Chapter IX is by no means a solitary one. Elsewhere in the novel the inhabitants of the Row are depicted as acting so closely in concert that the Row assumes the characteristics of an organic unit. When the idea of the raffle takes hold, Steinbeck describes the process thus: "Fission took hold in the Palace Flophouse, and from there a chain reaction flared up in all directions. Cannery Row caught fire." (p.328) Later, the idea of the party is described as spreading in a magic way:

The communications system on Cannery Row is mysterious to the point of magic and rapid to the speed of light. Fauna and Mack came to the decision that the party should be a masquerade on Friday evening at 9.11½. By 9.12 the magic had started, and by 9.30 everyone who was not asleep, drunk, or away knew about it. (pp.367-8)

These descriptions quite closely parallel those of the community's awakening desire to give Doc a party in Cannery Row. Just as in Cannery Row, a drive was imparted to the plot from the launching of this communal endeavour, so in Sweet Thursday Steinbeck attempts to advance the romantic narrative line by identifying communal endeavour with the community's wish to bring Doc and Suzy together.

Despite Steinbeck's sustained emphasis on the loneliness of the individual, he closely identifies Doc's dilemma with the community at large. For example, "Doc thought he was alone in his discontent, but he was not. Everyone on the Row observed him and worried about him." (p.221) The change in Doc comes about, we are told, "in spite of himself, in spite of the prayers of his friends, in spite of his own knowledge," (p.216) and "When trouble came to Doc it was everybody's trouble." (p.253) As a result, "His friends sensed his pain and caught it and carried it away with them. They knew the time was coming when they would have to do something." (p.254) The vague desire to do something about it grows, and "In the Palace Flophouse a little meeting occurred - occurred because no one called it, no one planned it, and yet everyone knew what it was about." (p.254) One direct result of that meeting is Mack's mission to sound out Doc's state of mind. However, in keeping with the far more diffuse push of the narrative line in

this novel, six chapters elapse before the visit occurs, and Mack reports: "We got to help him not to write that goddam paper." (p.297)

The two parallel threads of community concern for Doc and the developing love motif are irretrievably linked by Steinbeck in Chapters XIX and XX. The titles of the chapters, "Sweet Thursday (1)," and "Sweet Thursday (2)," are in themselves an indication of this. Chapter XIX deals with the advancement of the community plans for the Raffle and ends "...And this was only one of the happenings on that Sweet Thursday." (p.322) It is obviously paralleled by Chapter XX, dealing with the advancement of the love theme, which ends "... And this was the second event of that Sweet Thursday." (p.327)

From this point on, the plans for the raffle, cited by Steinbeck as "a perfect example of the collective goodness and generosity of a community," (p.329) run parallel to the developing romance, and the two themes find unified expression in Fauna's wish that the party should be "an engagement party too." (p.332) Doc and Suzy's dinner is followed by earnest community plans for the party and raffle.

The false grand finale of the party, attended by everyone on the Row, is followed by community shock. Steinbeck explains:

One of the common reactions to shock is lethargy. If after an automobile accident, one man is howling and writhing and another sits quietly staring into space, it is usually the quiet man who is badly hurt. A community can go into shock too. Cannery Row did. People drew into themselves, kept their doors closed, and didn't visit. Everyone felt guilty, even those who had not planned the party. (p.391)

This is why, when Suzy decides to go straight, "The Row, in its shame, pretended not to see what was going on at the boiler or to hear the sound of hammering late at night."

(p.398) Hazel's social calls reveal the extent of the community's concern for Doc, and the whole community is a barely off-stage audience to Doc's renewed courtship of Suzy: "Crossing the street he (Doc) knew he was being observed from every window from which he was visible, and he didn't care. He waved a salute to his unseen audience."

(p.436)

The happy ending is heralded by a diffuse community feeling for which we are prepared by the chapter heading "Sweet Thursday Revisited." We are told that "People felt good," (p.452) and that the news of Doc's broken arm is soon joyfully spread through the Row. Almost simultaneously, the Row's present for Doc arrives, and Suzy visits Doc. Similarly, the presentation of the gift by the community coincides with the happy ending to the romantic theme of the novel, for we are told quite specifically that "All Cannery Row was there," (p.461) and that as Doc and Suzy

depart happily into the sunset, "Cannery Row looked after the ancient car." (p.362)

Such attempts to meld a thematic, and often symbolic, concern with the doings of the group animal, with the strong thematic stress on the dilemma of Doc the individual lonely human being, by thus identifying the group endeavour with the happiness of Doc, are not entirely successful. This is largely because of the very different aesthetic contexts of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. The seeming contradiction of the individual and the community can, perhaps, be successfully resolved aesthetically in Steinbeck, only when the two elements are held in tension, as in Cannery Row. Steinbeck's emotionally powerful descriptions of Doc's loneliness, in Sweet Thursday, compete for our involvement with his strong stress elsewhere in the novel on the community as a whole. There is a conflict between the attempt at deep social statement in Sweet Thursday, characteristic of the earlier Cannery Row, and the themes of personal loneliness and the search for love. This conflict is very evident in the role of Doc, a role quite different from his role in Cannery Row.

The opening chapters set the tone that is to be emphasised throughout the novel. Mac's statement that "Everything's changed, Doc, everything," (p.215) and Doc's rejoinders "Maybe I'm changed too... I don't feel the same

Mack. I'm restless," (p.215) sum up the essence of Doc's dilemma. Doc's restlessness has in fact left the community leaderless. For example, he is no longer "The fountain of philosophy and science and art,"¹ and it is significant that although his books and music remain, they now provide personal consolation only. Bach's 'Art of the Fugue' seems to function merely as a sort of stiff whisky, providing Doc with sufficient courage to go to see Suzy. The Row's cultural life has become proportionately impoverished, reduced to the novelistic endeavours of Joe Elegant and the music of the Patron's wetbacks. The contrast between the past Doc of Cannery Row and the present Doc of Sweet Thursday is startling. Thus Fauna's description of Doc's role in the community is more accurate as a description of his role in Cannery Row than it is of his role in Sweet Thursday.

'He's one of the nicest fellas ever lived on Cannery Row. You'd think he'd turn bitter the way everybody hustles. Wide Ida gets him to analyze her booze, Mack and the boys throw the hook into him for every dime that sticks out, a kid cuts his finger on the Row and he goes to Doc to get it wrapped up. Why, when Becky got in a fight with that Woodman of the World and got bit in the shoulder, she might have lost her arm if it wasn't for Doc...' (p.307)

Steinbeck further emphasises this contradiction when,

¹John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 28.

having explained the close community ties on Cannery Row, he gives us a picture of Doc not borne out sufficiently fully in the novel by the character's actual actions.

Doc was more than first citizen of Cannery Row. He was healer of the wounded soul and the cut finger. Strongly entrenched in legality though he was, he found himself constantly edged into infringements by the needs of his friends, and anyone could hustle him for a buck without half trying. When trouble came to Doc it was Everybody's trouble. (p.253)

Another aspect of this paradox is that authorial emphasis on Doc's loneliness and restlessness,,and the concomitant emphasis on the romantic affair of Doc and Suzy is at odds with Steinbeck's considerable continuing emphasis on the social interrelationship of Doc and the Row. The only major difference is that whereas before Doc was the Row's leader and father figure, now the roles are reversed, and the emphasis is on the Row's familial concern for Doc. This social emphasis is not only reflected in the author's depiction of the Row as a whole, but also in the roles of the main characters, notably Mack and Fauna.

Instead of Mack's confession of his loneliness to Doc, Doc confides his restlessness to Mack, and Mack takes it upon himself to help Doc "not to write that goddam paper," (p.297) and to give him matrimonial advice. All this is in addition to his continuing role as leader of the

Flophouse Gang. Whereas in Cannery Row Mack was an able leader of the gang, being also the gang's intermediary with the outside world, he was, nevertheless, very dependent on Doc. In Sweet Thursday, Mack in effect takes over some of the social responsibility formerly exercised by Doc. Despite the fact that his resolution "to get Doc's arse out of the sling of despond" (p.274) is made in an alcoholic daze, Mack hits on what is evidently the correct theory when he says, "I think Doc needs a wife," (p.225) for Doc's dilemma is indeed happily resolved by Steinbeck in just this way at the end of the novel. Also, together with Fauna, Mack is one of the prime movers of the community's party for Doc. If the party does not turn out as planned, this is no reflection on Mack's organisational ability. This is quite different from his role in that first disastrous party in Cannery Row.

In addition to his far more independent role in the community at large, Mack's role as head of the Flophouse family is as strongly emphasised as it was in Cannery Row. By making Mack a sort of continuity man who tells Doc what has happened on the Row in his absence, Steinbeck explains that Mack was a sort of guardian who "just kind of stayed around and kept things in order." (p.203) Through most of the novel, Mack is to stay around and keep the gang in order. For example, Hazel knows he must turn to Mack for

an explanation of Doc's frustration, and all his anger and resolution notwithstanding, when faced by Mack, "Hazel felt the whole situation leaving his hands." (p.272) When Hazel refuses to be diverted from his purpose by mere affection, Mack is well able to rise to the occasion, providing firm leadership in the way he proposes a toast to Hazel, and announces his intention of helping Doc. He displays similar leadership ability in his response to the worrying situation over the ownership of the Flophouse. Not being sure of what to do, he calls a meeting of the gang and comes up with the plan to save their home, taking on himself the responsibility of going to see the Patron. In recognition of this,

since Mack was to bear the brunt of it, his friends cooked him a hot breakfast and Eddie mixed real bourbon whisky in his coffee. Hazel polished Mack's shoes and brushed his best blue jeans. Whitey no 1 brought out his father's hat for Mack to wear ... Mack didn't talk. He knew how much depended on him, and he was brave and humble at the same time.
(p.317)

Just as in Cannery Row, the gang's relationships are characterised by family feeling and emotional warmth. However absurd some of their plots and worries ultimately prove to be, their right motivation is what is emphasised by Steinbeck. The Gang, under Mack's leadership, also protect and care for their own, and this is why, when a sublimely de-

ceived Hazel makes his appearance at the party, "The guests looked at Hazel with stricken eyes, and no one laughed. One glance at Mack's jutting chin and doubled fists stopped that impulse." (p.385)

As in Cannery Row, the Gang's meetings are depicted as being characterised by good fellowship. Most of their meetings are in fact dedicated to helping their friend Doc, for "If the times were hard on Doc, they were equally hard on his friends who loved him." (p.255) Steinbeck even describes their changed feelings about Doc as "a kind and loving contempt that might never have happened if he had not once been so great." (p.255) On another occasion, describing the gang's deliberations about Doc, Steinbeck's descriptive style consciously invokes the same aura of comradeship that pervaded the gang's doings in Cannery Row: "It was like old times, they reminded one another. If Gay were only here - let's drink a toast to good old Gay, our departed friend." (p.273) As in Cannery Row, Steinbeck makes it unequivocally clear that the reader is meant to emotionally approve the gang's social doings. Authorial comment gives the boys symbolic stature beyond the immediate slightly ludicrous reality, as in the following description:

Somehow they felt they were living in a moment when history pauses and takes stock and changes course. They knew they would look back on this night as a

beginning. At such times men feel the nudge towards oratory. (p.274)

Another important figure in the novel is Fauna, the new madam of the Bear Flag. Whereas Dora played a relatively minor, although significant role in Cannery Row, her successor Fauna, is given a more prominent role in Sweet Thursday. In part, of course, her role as fairy godmother is an important narrative device to advance the romantic plot. Also important, however, is her larger social role in the life of the Row. Fauna provides social leadership both for the wider community of the Row, and for the lesser community of the Bear Flag.

She and Mack together shoulder the community's responsibility for helping Doc. The group which gathers for the first impromptu meeting at the Palace Flophouse, faced with total indecision as how best to help Doc, soon decides to send for Fauna, and eventually asks her to read Doc's horoscope. Her contrivance of Doc's wining and dining of Suzy partly arises from her love for Suzy, and partly from her awareness of, and identification with, the whole community's concern for Doc. This dual emotion is best expressed when she huskily asks Mack if he minds his party for Doc being an engagement party too, and Mack joyfully rejoins that this will make the party a tom-wallager. Stein-

beck sums up their shared goals thus: "They parted quietly but in their breasts a flame of emotion burned." (p.333)

In her role as head of the family of girls at the Bear Flag, Fauna's rule is, like that of Dora's was, a benignly matronly one. Steinbeck quite specifically tells us that "Fauna took a deep personal interest in her girls." (p. 285) One practical mark of her motherly care of her girls is her homely furnishing of the Ready Room, and provision of table tennis set, card table and parchesi board, all of which means that "The Ready Room was a place to relax, to read, to gossip, to study..." (p.285) She also cares about her girls' prospects in life. The board of stars prominently displayed on the wall of the Ready Room indicates those of Fauna's girls who have made good marriages. It is to this end that Fauna concerns herself with the proper social education of her girls, teaching them the table etiquette and posture she deems necessary to achieve a socially respectable match.

If Fauna is sometimes presented in a wily humorous light, she nevertheless also fits into the recurrent pattern of social criticism in Steinbeck's work, already noted in the discussion on Cannery Row. Madam though she is, she, even more than Dora Flood, is evidently intended to be part of Steinbeck's attack on respectability. Her social responsibility, compassion, and her worth as a human being,

stand in inverse proportion to her social standing. She may be the madam of a whore house but her behaviour is that of an exemplary mother. Similarly, she may run a highly illegal business, but Steinbeck makes the fact that she runs it at a great profit a mark in her favour, simultaneously scoring a mark against so-called respectable businesses:

Fauna had made a success of three improbable enterprises. More than likely she could have held her own in steel or chemicals, maybe even in General Electric, for Fauna had the proper ingredients for modern business. She was benevolent and at the same time solvent, public-spirited and privately an individualist, open-handed but with a delicate sense of double-entry book-keeping, sentimental but not soft. She could easily have been chairman of the board of a large corporation." (p.285)

Mack's assessment of Fauna in the opening chapter of the book neatly sums up her attitude to her profession. Comparing her present employment with her earlier missionary work, he says, "She didn't find her new profession very different from her old, and she thought of both as a public service." (p.202) Nevertheless, whatever Steinbeck's intentions, as Hugh Holman has so rightly pointed out, "The whores from the Bear Flag cherish and cultivate the middle class virtues however much they may depart from middle class ideas of morality." ¹ One must concur with his judgement

¹Holman, p. 19.

that characters like Fauna and her girls and Mack and the boys are a failure in that they "serve ... finally not to condemn the total social structure (as one feels they were intended to do) but to criticize its failures through the examples they yield of success." ¹

Clearly, Steinbeck still retains a social conscience and a concern with the doings of communal man, whatever the strength of the main narrative line, and other recurrent motifs in the novel. Sweet Thursday does not in fact satisfactorily conform to any single formula. Wallis named it "basically the story of Doc and Suzy," ² Moore named it "a burlesque," ³ French, a "light hearted farce," ⁴ Fontenrose, "a musical comedy plot," ⁵ and Metzger, "a pastoral." ⁶ No one label is entirely satisfactory. It cannot even be labelled simply a novel about the creative process as De Mott

¹Holman, p. 19.

²Wallis, p.247.

³Moore, pp. 326-327.

⁴French, p. 157.

⁵Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck: An introduction and Interpretation, (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1967), p. 127.

⁶Charles Metzger, "Steinbeck's Version of the Pastoral", Modern Fiction Studies, Summer, 6, pp. 115-124.

did, although this certainly is an important thematic concern.¹ I would suggest that Sweet Thursday has prompted such diverse critical comments because it is, as James Woodress has pointed out, a novel which exemplifies a dichotomy in Steinbeck: the dichotomy between Steinbeck the social critic, and Steinbeck the writer of potboilers.²

The thematic and aesthetic dichotomy I have traced in Sweet Thursday is that between Steinbeck's concern with the ultimate loneliness of the individual, and his concern with communal man. I feel this conflict to be deeply bound up with the aesthetic problems of the novel, and one which is artistically compounded by Steinbeck's often intrusively directive authorial role. In Sweet Thursday, he forces a confrontation of the paradoxes inherent in human sociality, whereas in Cannery Row he subtly conveyed their complexity in an evocative structural pattern. In Cannery Row, Steinbeck succeeded in emotionally convincing us of his view of human social behaviour. In Sweet Thursday he often attempts to bludgeon us by damagingly simplified 'truths'.

¹Robert De Mott, "Steinbeck and the Creative Process: First Manifesto to End the Bringdown Against Sweet Thursday", Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, Ed Astro and Hayashi, (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1971), pp. 157-178.

²James Woodress, "John Steinbeck: Hostage to Fortune", South Atlantic Quarterly, 63, pp. 385-388.

Perhaps this is most strongly exemplified in authorial directives on how the reader should respond to characters. Steinbeck seems to have largely lost the aesthetic distance which enabled him in Cannery Row to maintain a controlled tension in the characterisation of the protagonists. In Cannery Row he skilfully manipulated our response to symbolic characters such as Mack and the gang, by exploiting the credibility gap between our intellectual and emotional responses to them. He thus created an added dimension to his characters by maintaining a delicately ironic balance in the reader's perception of them. In Sweet Thursday, by contrast, increased authorial involvement with character often results only in an obtrusive exposition of character, and in a proportionate stripping down of character to bare symbol. Compare, for example, the delicately realised glorification of Mack and the gang's approach to social living in Cannery Row, resting on a series of underlying ironies, consistently and subtly organic to the whole context of the novel, with the often thin and heavily didactic presentation of Mack and the gang in Sweet Thursday, as exemplified in the passage below:

Mack and the boys had lived so long in the shadow of the vagrancy laws that they considered them a shield and an umbrella. Their association with larceny, fraud, loitering, illegal congregation, and conspiracy on all levels was not only accepted, but to a certain

extent had become a matter of pride to the inhabitants of Cannery Row. But they were lamblike children of probity and virtue compared to Joseph and Mary. (p.209)

Steinbeck's revelation of characters and of their symbolic significance through a complex pattern of actions, and careful, often ironic, juxtaposition of incident, has given way to what is almost a positing of character. The message now takes precedence over the burden of its proof.

Commonly, in Sweet Thursday, Steinbeck is led to intervene to explain the motivation of the protagonists. At several points in the novel he explains at length of the reasons for Doc's loneliness, as in the passage beginning "Doc was changing in spite of himself, in spite of the prayers of his friends, in spite of his own knowledge..." and ending, "And the bottom voice would sing 'Lonesome, lonesome! You're trying to buy your way in.'" (pp.216-21) Later in the chapter, authorial comment on Doc is so laboured that it runs the risk of being classed as irrelevant philosophising, where it is intended as enlightening and symbolic comment. The following passage illustrates the clumsy transition from realistic narrative to symbolic statement. A girl has just walked out on Doc, despairing of ever even gaining his attention.

... Her interest in science blinked out like a candle, but a flame was lighted in Doc.

The flame of conception seems to flare and go out, leaving man shaken, and at once happy and afraid. There's plenty of precedent of course. Everyone knows about Newton's apple. Charles Darwin said his Origin of Species flashed complete in one second, and he spent the rest of his life backing it up; and the theory of relativity occurred to Einstein in the time it takes to clap your hands. This is the greatest mystery of the human mind - the inductive leap. Everything falls into place, irrelevancies relate, dissonance becomes harmony, and nonsense wears a crown of meaning. But the clarifying leap springs from the rich soil of confusion, and the leaper is not unfamiliar with pain.

The girl said good-bye and went away, and Doc did not know she was gone. (pp.223-4)

The interchapters of Sweet Thursday seem to exemplify the worst facets of the thematic conflict which undermines the aesthetic unity of the novel. Unlike the allegorical interchapters of Cannery Row, which provide a symbolic framework to the episodic stories of individual members of the Row, these interchapters are extraneous to the strong plot-line, and embody the self-conscious mysticism of Steinbeck the philosopher. They underscore the lack of artistic pattern in the novel. For example, the first Hooptedoodle chapter relates change in the microcosm of Cannery Row to macrocosmic change, and contains the lengthy authorial intervention on Doc's loneliness, already referred to above. Chapter VIII, "The Great Roque War," and Chapter XXXVIII, "Hooptedoodle (2)," are both satiric comments on the frequent pettiness of human social behaviour.

Even the two chapters in which the Seer figures prominently embody social comment as well as the Seer's philosophy of life. The Seer is clearly a literary cover for Steinbeck, and the meetings between Doc and the Seer, and between Hazel and the Seer, are not to be understood on a narrative level only. The Seer is described in allegorical rather than realistic terms. He has "the lively, innocent eyes of a healthy baby," (p.263) yet "his face was granite-chiselled out of the material of prophets and patriarchs. Doc found himself wondering if some of the saints had not looked like this." (p.263) The Seer's personal answer to society is to live alone, in the open, a modern visionary. Doc closely echoes Steinbeck's views on the ills of society when he says to the Seer, "'I'm surprised they don't lock you up - a reasonable man. It's one of the symptoms of our time to find danger in men like you who don't worry and rush about.'" (p.266) The Seer's message of salvation to Doc, as it is later to Hazel, is simply the message of love. In many ways the dichotomy between the Seer's own life-style and his message, mirrors the two-way pull in the novel between social comment and the strongly structured plot which follows the development of a loving relationship between two individuals.

In sum, that nice tension between the biologist-philosopher's concern with society as a whole, and the artist's love of the individual, which formerly provided

thematic and aesthetic unity in Cannery Row, has become a conflict of interests in Sweet Thursday. Structurally this conflict is evident in the often divergent pulls of the strong romantic plot-line and authorial comment on communal man. In addition, overly directive authorial comment reveals a lack of aesthetic distance which compounds the basic thematic conflict in the novel, most noticeably with regard to characterisation.

Steinbeck has, in this novel, radically altered the personality of the Doc figure who, as numerous critics have pointed out, was the author's mask in so many of his previous novels, from Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, to Doc in Cannery Row, to Jim Casey in Grapes of Wrath, to Lee in East of Eden.¹ In many ways the figure of Doc stands not only for Steinbeck's beliefs but for his aesthetic ideals, and perhaps it is a measure of Steinbeck's artistic failure in this novel, that he fails to live up to those earlier ideals of Doc Burton, who wanted "to be able to see the whole thing", unobscured by preconceived judgements or blind commitment to a cause.² Doc Burton's explanation to Mac that "I

¹Fairly representative are the comments of: Astro, pp. 109-22, Brown, pp. 47-52, French, p. 136, Holman, pp. 18-20, and Lisca, p. 215.

²John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, (London: Heron Books, 1971), p. 124.

want to see the whole picture - as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of 'good' and 'bad', and limit my vision," ¹ closely parallels Steinbeck's own firm stand on artistic integrity early in his career.

¹Ibid., p. 124.

CHAPTER THREE:

INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER IN THE MOON IS DOWN

The Moon Is Down, written in 1942, should be considered in the context of the whole of Steinbeck's literary output during the war. Steinbeck was deeply concerned about the war, a point discussed at length by Peter Lisca in his book The Wide World of John Steinbeck. Lisca traces Steinbeck's increasing involvement with the war, from his general fears about Man's incapacity to learn the lessons of history, expressed in a letter to Covici in 1940, to his deeper personal commitment to the war effort from about 1942 onwards. Lisca suggests that it is highly probable that Steinbeck's trip with Ricketts to the Sea of Cortez in 1941 was "a desire to escape the pressures of popularity and to ease his growing concern with the possibilities of global war."¹ At the same time, as Lisca points out, "although Steinbeck was shocked at this new evidence that wars are a biological trait of man, he was also eager to participate in the struggle."² Out of his desire to participate in the war effort came three major pieces of

¹Lisca, p. 180.

²Ibid., p. 183.

writing. He wrote Bombs Away "to tell the whole people of the kind and quality of our Air Force, of the caliber of its men and of the excellence of its equipment,"¹ and in 1943, after writing The Moon Is Down, he went to Europe as foreign correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune. His wartime dispatches to that paper were later published as Once There Was A War. Both Bombs Away and Once There Was A War are quite obviously a part of the journalistic war effort. However, Lisca reports that even The Moon Is Down also

had its roots in Steinbeck's war effort. It was the result of several conversations he had with Colonel William J. Donovan (Office of Strategic Services) on ways of aiding resistance movements in Nazi-occupied countries.²

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to view The Moon Is Down merely in terms of Steinbeck's war effort. It should also be viewed in the context of Steinbeck's work as a whole, and particularly in the context of The Log From The Sea of Cortez, written the year before. Whilst engaged in writing The Log, Steinbeck said,

¹John Steinbeck, Bombs Away, (New York: Viking Press, 1942), p. 5., quoted by Lisca, p. 184.

²Lisca, p. 186.

When this work is done I will have finished a cycle of work that has been biting me for many years, and it is simply the careful statement of the thesis of work to be done in the future. ¹

As numerous critics have noted, Steinbeck's earlier novels bear the strong imprint of the biologist's view of man; a view which finds its fullest exposition in The Log From The Sea of Cortez. In this work, Steinbeck develops and refines his ideas about man's place in the ecological system of which he is part. The teeming tide pools of the Sea of Cortez provide him with a perfect microcosm. In the pools Steinbeck sees mirrored the perpetual struggle for life, which he believes to be characteristic also of the human condition. Some of the ideas crystallised in The Log thus throw light on Steinbeck's portrayal of social man in The Moon Is Down. Particularly relevant to this novel are his observations on the necessity for a species to strive continuously for its existence. He remarks:

Where there is little danger there seems to be little stimulation. Perhaps the pattern of struggle is so deeply imprinted in the genes of all life conceived in this benevolently hostile planet that the removal of obstacles automatically atrophies a survival drive. With warm water and abundant food, the

¹Letter from John Steinbeck to Pascal Covici, 6/9/41, quoted by Lisca, p. 183.

animals may retire into a sterile sluggish happiness. This has certainly seemed true in man. ¹

After expanding on this point by reference to various human societies which have exhibited this trait, he extends his argument further:

We have little doubt that a victorious collective state would collapse only a little less quickly than a defeated one. In fact, a bitter defeat would probably keep a fierce conquest-ideal alive much longer than a victory, for men can fight an enemy much more successfully than themselves. ²

The first observation is clearly exemplified in the sluggish attitude of the conquered people at the beginning of The Moon Is Down. The second finds its fictional expression in Steinbeck's depiction of the relatively quick collapse of the collectivist invading force of Colonel Lanser. This collapse forms a major part of the main narrative thread of the novel.

If Steinbeck's portrayal of social man in The Moon Is Down has its roots in his biological thought, his immediate reasons for writing the novel were, as already noted, propagandist. This has far-reaching consequences on the novel.

¹John Steinbeck, The Log From The Sea of Cortez, (London: Heron Books, 1971), p. 227.

²The Log From The Sea of Cortez, p. 228.

For one thing, all material in the novel is tautly subordinated to the depiction of the central political conflict; the mortal combat of two quite different species of social man. A natural corollary of this in the novel is the proportionately greater stress on communal political activity than on individual interrelationships, even political ones.

Consider, for example, the way in which Steinbeck uses this struggle between two diametrically opposed political systems as a pivotal point about which to structure his novel. The conflict forms the firm base of the novel's plot-line which charts the inexorable upward turn in the fortunes of the "free men", against the corresponding downward movement in the fortunes of the "herd men", who, without a conquest-ideal, are doomed to lose their battle with the townfolk.

The first two sentences of the novel succinctly indicate the initial inferiority of the townfolk, who, after years of security, have become sluggish and politically unprepared: "By ten forty-five it was all over. The town was occupied, the defenders defeated, and the war finished."¹

¹John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down, (London: Heron Books, 1971), p. 3. (All subsequent page references are from this edition, and will appear in brackets after the quotation.)

The third sentence indicates the initial overwhelming superiority of the invading army: "The invader had prepared for this campaign as carefully as he had for larger ones." (p. 3) The remainder of the opening section of the first chapter expands these statements, detailing the invaders' efficient occupation of the town, and the inhabitants' almost ludicrous state of bewilderment. Doctor Winter, we are told, "watched in amazement while his thumbs rolled over and over, in his lap." (p. 5) Mayor Orden's wife helps him prepare to receive the invading leader. She insists on trimming the hair out of his ears, and fusses over the proper social reception of Colonel Lanser. Both Doctor Winter and Mayor Orden are completely stunned by the news of Corell's treachery and of their countrymen's lack of resistance. The mayor sums up the town's bewilderment thus: "The people are confused now. They have lived at peace so long that they do not quite believe in war." (pp. 12-13) He also predicts that "...They will learn and then they will not be confused any more." (p. 13) In the opening lines of the novel, Steinbeck thus neatly suggests the narrow but intense focus to be maintained throughout the novel.

Having delineated the poles of conflict, Steinbeck then skilfully intensifies what is to be the constant apposition of invaders and invaded. The townsfolk's

increasing self-confidence is counterbalanced by the troops' decreasing self-confidence. A first very small skirmish is won by Annie. However, Hunter expresses the troops' as yet unchallenged control and their sense of total superiority when he says, "These people are harmless enough. They seem to be good, obedient, people." (p. 30) Steinbeck times Alex Morden's killing of Bentick, the first real challenge to the authority of the conquerors, to coincide with Corell's complacent attempts to reassure Lanser that his people are "simple peaceful people." (p. 40) Already the young lieutenants are less self-assured than they were, and the townspeople have lost their first sense of shock, although "still a light of anger had not taken its place." (p. 44)

Alex Morden's arrest initiates a new chain of events. It prompts Annie and Joseph to anger, forces the Mayor to assess his own stance vis a vis the invaders, nurtures the first community conspiracy, and increases the villagers' hatred of Corell. The change in Joseph is representative of the changed mood of the town. Immediately after the invasion we were told that "sooner or later Joseph would have to get an opinion about it all." (p. 5) Now, by contrast, we are told, "Joseph at last had opinions." (p. 47) The trial of Alex will finally force a sense of their need to be socially and politically united. As Mayor Orden tells

Alex, minutes before Alex's death:

Alex, go, knowing that these men will have no rest, no rest at all until they are gone, or dead. You will make the people one. It's a sad knowledge and little enough gift to you, but it is so. No rest at all. (p. 61)

Mere seconds later, Lieutenant Prackle is shot.

Steinbeck skilfully suggests the inevitability of further conflict by making Orden quietly remind Lanser of their earlier conversation about the repeated failure of his government's conventional responses to insurgents. For a brief moment, Lanser permits himself to remember, before he initiates the conventional policies of reprisal which he, and Orden, and the reader, know will fail. Just how quickly they will fail soon becomes apparent, as good miners unaccountably make mistakes, and "The people of the conquered country settled in a slow, silent, waiting revenge." (p. 63) Steinbeck emphasises the atmosphere of tension, and the ineffectiveness of shooting people in reprisal, or of withholding food from the disobedient. The people are beginning to realise that strong internal interdependence means unity, and that unity means strength. Thus, as the hatred grows, so does the uneasiness of the once triumphant conquerors:

Now it was that the conqueror was surrounded, the men of the battalion alone among silent enemies, and no man might relax his guard even for a moment ... and gradually a little fear began to grow in the conquerors, a fear that it would never be over, that they could never relax or go home, a fear that one day they would crack and be hunted through the mountains like rabbits, for the conquered never relaxed their hatred. (pp. 65-6)

This hatred is given added emphasis by Steinbeck's often heavily ironic highlighting of the changed circumstances of individual characters. Thus Prackle's sarcastic baiting of Tonder underlines Tonder's hysteria, the decline in the troops' morale, and also the increasing superiority of the now unified conquered people, of whom Tonder says,

'These people! These horrible people! These cold people! They never look at you! ... They never speak. They answer like dead men. They obey, these horrible people. And the girls are frozen.'
(p. 69)

Having depicted the changed situation through the eyes of the invaders, Steinbeck contrasts external events with what is happening behind the cold facade of the town. As the invaders' patrol talks longingly of good food, pretty girls and home, the Mayor and Doctor Winter meet with the Anders boys, soon to sail for England, and the Mayor sends his request for help in the fight against the invaders. Once more, a train of events is set in motion.

From this point on, each action on the part of one side will provoke a proportionately more extreme response from the other. The quickened pace of events conveys the way in which the conflict has escalated, as Steinbeck rapidly swings attention from one side to the other, now on the invader, now on the invaded. The Mayor's meeting with the Anders boys is closely followed by Molly Morden's killing of Tonder. This in turn is followed by the dropping of the dynamite requested by the Mayor. As the full implications of the drop begin to dawn on the increasingly demoralised invaders, panic sets in. Colonel Lanser barely has time to reassure a badly shaken Lieutenant Prackle, before the entrance of an embittered Corell. Corell's new position of authority forces the next and final escalation. The arrest of Mayor Orden and Doctor Winter, who are to be held hostage against the town's good behaviour, will force a showdown and ensure the continuation of the conflict. Lanser's words to Corell, "I do hope you know what you're doing", (p. 111) have an ominous ring to them, an impression confirmed by the way Steinbeck so closely juxtaposes Lanser's comment with the description of the townpeople's quietly jubilant reaction to the news of Mayor Orden's arrest:

In the town the news ran quickly. It was communicated by whispers in door-ways, by quick, meaningful looks - 'The Mayor's been arrested' - and through

the town a little quiet jubilation ran, a fierce little jubilation, and people going in to buy food leaned close to the clerks for a moment and a word passed between them. (p. 111)

The climax comes quickly. The townsfolk's search for dynamite is intensified, as is that of a now jittery soldiery. Mayor Orden and Doctor Winter, sadly recognising the inevitability of their own deaths, have at least the consolation of knowing that the people will grow stronger and that new leaders will emerge after their deaths. The Mayor's quiet conviction that the people will continue to fight, is almost immediately justified by the series of explosions which rock the town. The novel ends as the Mayor goes out to die, with Doctor Winter's promise that "the debt shall be paid." (p.122)

Nonetheless, Steinbeck's skilful pivoting of the plot around the opposition of invaders and invaded can provide a structural aesthetic framework only. A large measure of the novel's success must still rest, as does that of Cannery Row, on the degree to which the reader is emotionally engaged by the conflict, and emotionally convinced by Steinbeck's view of it. What then, of the human implications of the conflict? Does Steinbeck successfully trace the conflict at the level of individual interrelationships, or does he see only the larger conflict in terms of the conflict of two communal units?

The answer is a complex one, for there seems a strange discrepancy between the writer's stated aims and the aesthetic result. It is obvious that Steinbeck's intention is to show the superiority of the democratic form of government. Indeed, as Steinbeck explicitly explained in his introduction to his short novels, "The war came on, and I wrote The Moon Is Down as a kind of celebration of the durability of democracy." ¹ Paradoxically, though, we seem to see very little of the democratic process in action, at the level of individual interrelationships. Nevertheless, Steinbeck is quite clearly attempting to describe the conflict in terms of the very different types of social relationships which result from the respective political systems. In particular, he makes constant reference to the contrasting roles of the individual within each system. For example, he carefully presents the larger conflict in terms of the personal confrontation of individual protagonists; in particular that of Mayor Orden and Colonel Lanser, both of whom are leaders of men. In one of his first descriptions of the town, Steinbeck tells us that this is "a world where Mayor Orden was leader of men." (p. 5) Similarly, the first description of Colonel Lanser distinguishes him from his men: "He had the square shoulders of

¹John Steinbeck, "My Short Novels", Tedlock and Wicker, p. 39.

a soldier but his eyes lacked the blank look of the ordinary soldier." (p. 15)

Both men are also shown to be aware of their standing relative to the political system they serve. The Mayor, for his part, is ever conscious of the fact that he is the elected representative of his people, a consciousness sharpened by Colonel Lanser's requests for an orderly town. His response to such requests is to express uncertainty because "Some people accept appointed leaders and obey them. But my people elected me." (p. 20) The Colonel, by contrast, defines his own role more in terms of his relationship to the hierarchy than in terms of his relationship to his troops. He sees himself as the executive arm of policy formulated by the leaders. For example, his explanation of the need for the cooperation of the townsfolk is that "We must get the coal, you see. Our leaders do not tell us how; they order us to get it." (p. 20)

By emphasising the similarity between the two men, such as their potential for leadership and their mutual respect, Steinbeck is able to greatly intensify the focus on the different political organisations in which each works, and of which each is representative. On the one hand, the respect in which Mayor Orden is held by the townsfolk comes from his role in the trial of Alex Morden, his

help with the escape of the Anders boys, and his planning of sabotage generally. Corell's remarks to Colonel Lanser that "this man is a leader of a rebellious people" (p. 109) are, ironically, a confirmation of his stature. Conversely, the respect in which Colonel Lanser is held emerges from his able handling of the series of demoralising events which beset his troops. Working within highly restrictive orders, he is nevertheless a shrewd leader of men, as is exemplified by his handling of Loft's attempted insubordination over the issue of the parachutes, and of Prackle's despairing wish to go home. The strong contrast between the two men thus rests entirely on their respective political roles. Steinbeck makes it clear that Mayor Orden's greater strength derives from his complete confidence in the democratic government. On the other hand, Colonel Lanser's weakness is not a personal flaw but derives from the system to which he owes obedience. In the following conversation between Mayor Orden and Colonel Lanser, Steinbeck highlights Orden's confidence and Lanser's divided loyalties.

... 'you see, what I think, sir, I, a man of a certain age and certain memories, is of no importance. I might agree with you, but that would change nothing. The military, the political pattern I work in has certain tendencies and practices which are invariable.'

Orden said. 'And these tendencies and practices have been proven wrong in every single case since the

beginning of the world.'

Lanser laughed bitterly. 'I, an individual man with certain memories, might agree with you, might even add that one of the tendencies of the military mind and pattern is an inability to learn, an inability to see beyond the killing which is its job. But I am not a man subject to memories. The coal miner must be shot publicly, because the theory is that others will then restrain themselves from killing our men.' (p. 55)

Every further meeting between Orden and Lanser exacerbates the conflict, even as it deepens understanding and respect at a personal level. Thus whilst Lanser and Orden may share a smile at Loft's expense during the trial of Alex Morden, nevertheless, Lanser has no choice but to sentence Morden to death. There is an inevitable progression to that final fateful confrontation of Mayor Orden and Colonel Lanser which is the climax of the novel. Steinbeck clearly indicates this confrontation to be representative of the larger conflict of "herd men" and "free men". As Mayor Orden explains to Lanser:

'You will be destroyed and driven out... The people don't like to be conquered, sir, and so they will not be. Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. 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...' (p. 120)

This is an echo of Doctor Winter's comment that:

'They (the invaders) think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people, and in a time of need leaders pop up among us like mushrooms.' (pp. 113-114)

In turn, both Mayor Orden's and Doctor Winter's speeches are extremely close to views expressed by Steinbeck in The Log From The Sea of Cortez. This lends added credence to the notion that Colonel Lanser and Mayor Orden are to be thought of as representative of, and typical of, the kind of social behaviour which Steinbeck believes results from the political organisation of their respective states. The failure of the kind of collectivist state of which Colonel Lanser is representative, is very well described in The Log From The Sea of Cortez. From the premiss that "over-integration in human groups might parallel the law in paleontology that over-armor or over-ornamentation are symptoms of decay and disappearance",¹ Steinbeck quotes the examples of the Third Reich and the Politburo-controlled Soviet, pointing out that "The sudden removal of twenty-five key men from either system could cripple it so thoroughly that

¹Preface to The Log From The Sea of Cortez, p. XLVIII.

it would take a long time to recover if it ever could".¹
He concludes that "A too greatly integrated system or society is in danger of destruction since the removal of one unit may cripple the whole."²

Just as Steinbeck manipulates the two protagonists, Colonel Lanser and Mayor Orden in such a way as to point out the relative merits of the political systems of which they are part, he also counterbalances other less important characters in the novel to the same end. For example, Doctor Winter's supportive role to Mayor Orden is closely paralleled by that of Hunter to Colonel Lanser. Both reassure their superiors in times of stress. However, whereas Hunter becomes increasingly disconcerted by the breaks in his railroad system, Doctor Winter gains in self-confidence, even as his personal fortunes take a downward turn. Doctor Winter's finest hour occurs at a moment when his own life is in greatest danger. It is a firm conviction in the rightness of the democratic system which enables him to triumph over the tragedy of the moment, and to reassure Mayor Orden that "The debt shall be paid." (p. 221) Hunter, by contrast, expresses no such firm conviction in the rightness of the system he serves.

¹Ibid., p. LVIII.

²Ibid., p. XLIX.

The role of the group is at least as prominent as that of the individual. Steinbeck lays heavy stress on the opposition of townsfolk and troops. Both of these groups are frequently identified in terms of group behaviour characteristic of the political system to which they owe allegiance. The townsfolk, for example, are continuously referred to as the organic democratic unit, "the people". In the first reference to them in the novel, Doctor Winter tells the mayor's wife that "the people might not like him (the mayor) to drink wine with the invader." (p. 12) Later, Mayor Orden refers constantly to "the people" in his discussion about the maintenance of order with Colonel Lanser, explaining to him that "authority is in the town". (p. 23) After Alex Morden's killing of Bentick, Steinbeck tells us that "In the town the people moved sullenly through the streets", and a little later, that "Everybody" knows about the escape of William Deal and Walter Doggel. The growth of hatred against the invaders is also described in terms of communal feeling and communal activity:

... over the town there hung a blackness that was deeper than the cloud, and over the town there hung a sullenness and a dry, growing hatred. The people did not stand in the streets long, but they entered the doors and the doors closed and there seemed to be eyes looking from behind the curtains and when the military went through the street or when the patrol walked down the main street, the eyes were on the patrol, cold and sullen. (pp. 56-7)

This communal sullenness is later referred to by Lieutenant Tonder who recoils in horror from "these people! These horrible people! These cold people!" (p. 69) Again, it is "the people" who "went into the country, into the woods, searching for dynamite" (p. 111) and who "almost as though at a signal ... went into their houses, and the doors were closed, the streets very quiet." (p. 112) "The people" are also said to react emotionally as one to the news of the mayor's arrest, when "through the town a little jubilation ran, a fierce little jubilation..." (p. 111) In the final analysis, as Mayor Orden explains to Colonel Lanser, it is "the people" who will light the fuse regardless of the fact that his own life is dependent on them not doing so.

Fontenrose relates the depiction of the town as communal entity to that in other Steinbeck novels, and comments that, "The Norwegian town is a Steinbeck community: it is like a colonial animal. News and rumor run quickly through it; it is homogenous and united..."¹

Aside from Colonel Lanser and Major Hunter, the troops too are frequently identified as a group, whether referred to as "the Invaders", or "the Conquerors", or "the men of the battalion". Steinbeck adopts a generalistic approach even in the sections of the novel in which he is ostensibly

¹Fontenrose, p. 100.

distinguishing the one group from another. Thus the introductory sketches of Colonel Lanser's staff, convey nothing more than the sense of a matching set: an impression confirmed by the concluding remarks that "These were the men of the staff, each one playing war as children play 'Run, Sheep, Run'...And their war so far had been play - fine weapons and fine planning against unarmed, planless enemies." (p. 77)

The people's growing hatred is matched by the conqueror's growing fear, and this fear is also described in collective rather than individual terms. It is characterised by references to the behaviour of a generic "he", or "men of the battalion", or "they", as in the following descriptions: "Now it was that the conqueror was surrounded, the men of the battalion among silent enemies, and no man might relax his guard for even a moment ..." (p. 63); "And the men thought always of home..." (p. 64); "Then the soldiers read the news from home and from the other conquered countries and the news was always good, and for a little while they believed it, and then after a while they did not believe it any more..." (p. 64); "And the officers were a reflection of their men..." (p. 65). The soldiers are often described impersonally, or as an anonymous group, as in the following description of patrol duties: "The hushed tramp of their feet sounded in the street, the squeaks of their boots on the packed snow. They were muffled figures deep

in thick coats." (p. 76) Other descriptions of guard duties on the night the dynamite is parachuted in are very similar. The troops are identified only as "the guards", or "The six men of the patrol", or "one of the muffled soldiers", or as "the corporal" or "the soldier", or "a sergeant".

Despite such a careful depiction of group and individual conflict, the problem remains that although the main thematic concern in The Moon Is Down involves the relationships of individuals within their respective political systems of government, Steinbeck largely delineates political interdependences in terms of somewhat vaguely drawn communal or group units. H. S. Levant distinguishes between Steinbeck's earlier work, in which "a group can have a dramatic role... and when this role is realised most fully, the individual can be perceived roundly within the actions of the group", and The Moon Is Down, in which "the group concept becomes an abstraction." ¹

Thus, despite the technical skill with which Steinbeck has constructed his novel and manipulated his groups of characters, the reader feels a sense of dissatisfaction with The Moon Is Down. Although the plot is coherent, the theme clear, the structural patterning neat, we fail to be

¹H.S. Levant, A Critical Study of the Longer Fiction of John Steinbeck, (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Cornell University, 1962), p. 231.

involved with characters such as Mayor Orden, in the way we are with characters such as Mack and the gang in Cannery Row. As critics have pointed out, the major characters in The Moon Is Down suffer from being static presentations of the author's formulated ideas about society. Peter Lisca, for example, has said that "The difficulty with Lanser is the same as that with the other characters. After reading the first description of him, one knows as much about him as one does at the end of the book." ¹

This contrasts strongly with the skilful way Steinbeck exploits the tension between his scientific view of man the group-animal, and his artist's love for the individual, in Cannery Row. Steinbeck's one-sided concern with his political message has had ironic consequences, aesthetically. In the end, even the heroic Mayor Orden, has become a stereotype of the individualism for which he stands. Certainly Steinbeck is quite consciously reducing character to allegorical function. Indeed, as we have already noted, the clear-cut division of protagonists into two opposing factions provides a structural strength in the novel. However, such characterisation is ultimately a

¹Lisca, p. 193.

severe strain on credibility, and a restriction on emotional involvement.

Paradoxically, then, a major reason for Steinbeck's failure to achieve his aims appears to be the very fact that he had such definitive aims at all. Because Steinbeck set out to celebrate the durability of democracy, the novel has a clearly defined structure, and a formal perfection: on the other hand, such a clearly propagandist aim has proved inhibiting to credible characterisation. Such a decided viewpoint precludes ambiguities and encourages over simplification in characterisation. It is interesting to note in this connection that Steinbeck does not develop the potentially complex role of Corell, the traitor, for the reason that he sees the result of the conflict and the nature of the two political systems as unalterable truths. Crises of conscience and soul searching have no place in such a novel as The Moon Is Down.

Such a clearly defined authorial purpose also explains Steinbeck's heavy stress on the larger political group, and the proportionately insignificant attention paid to individual social interrelationships and conflicts. More detailed portrayal of the political interdependences between individuals might, perhaps, have resulted in a more credible realisation of the social action and behaviour at the heart of his basic assertion about the durability of democracy.

As it is, Warren French is correct in pointing out that although the novel conveys the message clearly, "the story does not illustrate its truth." ¹

¹French, p. 115.

CONCLUSION

In this study, Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon is Down have been considered primarily from the point of view of the social interdependence of character common to all three novels. As we have seen, Steinbeck's aim in Cannery Row is to capture alive the life-form that is Cannery Row. In this novel he explores the delicate relationship between individual and communal man. Each episode about each individual or group of individuals serves also to illuminate social interrelationships and, thus, the nature of the communal group. In Sweet Thursday, Steinbeck retains a thematic concern with many of the same features of human social behaviour he depicted in such detail in Cannery Row. In both novels the main characters are markedly individualist in their views, yet they are also strongly social in their behaviour. In The Moon Is Down, however, Steinbeck's interest is specifically in man the political animal, and in this novel he explores the relationship of the individual to the political system of which he is part.

In Cannery Row, Steinbeck is strongly critical of middle-class values, and of the aims and structure of contemporary American society. In The Moon Is Down, by con-

trast, he is strongly critical of a collectivist state such as Nazi Germany, and stoutly defends the virtues of a democratic society. The world portrayed in The Moon Is Down is very different from the world of bums, paisanos, whores, and migrant workers, typical of the earlier Steinbeck novels. In The Moon Is Down, Steinbeck, the one-time social critic and defender of social outcasts, champions the system which he formerly described in terms of capitalist repression and terrible social inequalities. This social system was one in which Tom Joad was told that a boss defined a Red as "any son of a bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're paying twenty five."¹ The ruthless, often inhumane society of the Steinbeck novels of the 30's is thus totally unlike the model democratic society of The Moon Is Down. Patently, Steinbeck's attitudes towards society, and towards American society in particular, had changed radically over the years. Cannery Row follows in the tradition of Steinbeck social criticism, established by the major novels of the 30's. However, by 1954, Steinbeck's attacks on middle-class values in Sweet Thursday are no more than superficial lip-service to a view of society to which he no longer really subscribes. Steinbeck's propagandist defence of democracy in The Moon Is Down, written in 1942,

¹John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, (London: Heron Books, 1971), p. 260.

had already marked a clear change in direction from the earlier fiction of social criticism. The three novels thus reflect the fact that they were written over a period of time which saw changes in Steinbeck's attitudes towards society.

Critics have generally remarked that diversity of literary form is characteristic of Steinbeck's work. For example, Hugh Holman, in his review of Sweet Thursday, comments on the baffling variety of Steinbeck's work:

He had appeared to be a naturalist of the Biological Determination persuasion and a celebrator of the simple joys of life, the author of effective social propaganda and of mystically symbolic and wryly comic parables ... Among the fifteen volumes of his prose fiction that preceded Sweet Thursday, Steinbeck has produced an impressive strike novel, (In Dubious Battle), a powerfully effective propaganda novel, (The Grapes of Wrath), three stylized experiments with plays in novel form, (Of Mice and Men, The Moon Is Down, and Burning Bright), a volume of distinguished short stories, (The Long Valley), an "epic" prose poem of too great length, (East of Eden), and a group of picaresque, comic novels on the delights of poverty and lawlessness, (The Pastures of Heaven,¹ Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row and The Wayward Bus.

Study of the social interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday and The Moon Is Down has also revealed something of this diversity of literary form. As we have seen, thematic organisation in the first novel, Cannery Row,

¹Holman, pp. 18-19.

derives from the interplay of incident rather than from a strong narrative line. By the skilful juxtaposition of numerous small incidents, which are apparently unrelated to the main plot-line tracing the community's plans to give Doc a party, Steinbeck successfully conveys the complex pattern of social interrelationships in the microcosm that is Cannery Row. By contrast, thematic organisation in both Sweet Thursday and The Moon Is Down centres on clearly defined plot-lines. In Sweet Thursday, this plot traces the progress of a love affair to its traditional happy ending. In the latter novel, the plot traces the conflict between the conquered peoples of a democratic state and the conquering collectivist invaders.

The Moon Is Down is quite different from either Cannery Row or Sweet Thursday in that Steinbeck himself termed it a "play-novelette", and not a novel. In an article written for Stage, he explained that this new literary genre was "an attempt to write a novel that could be played from the lines or a play that could be read." ¹ In fact, the discrepancy already noted between Steinbeck's stated aims, and the aesthetic results, in The Moon Is Down,

¹John Steinbeck, "The novel might benefit by the discipline, the terseness of the drama...", Stage, Vol 15: Jan 1938, p. 50.

would seem to stem in part, at least, from this attempt to experiment with literary form. For example, his somewhat abstract delineation of character is far more successful in the play version of The Moon Is Down than in the novel.¹ In the play, abstract characters can be given particularity by the actors, whereas the characters in the novel lack this particularity and thus also lack credibility. No amount of what are, in effect, stage directives from Steinbeck, embodied within the narrative portion of the novel, can make the characters credible in the way Mack and the gang were in Cannery Row. The result is a piece of writing which falls uncomfortably between two genres. It is neither "a novel that could be played from the lines", nor "a play that could be read."²

In fact, there are wide variations in the overall skill with which Steinbeck handles his material in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon Is Down. This is particularly true of his handling of the theme of social inter-

¹John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down: A Play in Two Parts, (New York: The Viking Press, 1943.)

²For a fuller discussion of Steinbeck's justification of his new literary genre, its relationship of his work as a whole, and its relevance to The Moon Is Down, see: H.S. Levant, A Critical Study of the Longer Fiction of John Steinbeck, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 1962), pp. 205-9, 228-47.

relationships in the three novels. An appreciation of a basic dichotomy in Steinbeck is helpful in understanding why this is so. Given Steinbeck's belief in, and love for, the individual, it is clearly paradoxical that his novels should place so much stress on man as a group animal, or biological unit. This dichotomy in Steinbeck's work reflects a basic tension between Steinbeck the 'engaged' artist, and Steinbeck the philosopher-biologist. This tension can be either a strength or a weakness artistically as is evident in the three novels studied.

In Cannery Row, Steinbeck achieves an aesthetically satisfying fusion of the biologist's and the artist's viewpoint on Mankind. Making the community of Cannery Row the explicit subject of his novel effects a reconciliation between the two seemingly contradictory ways of viewing man. His biological interest in the community as a whole acts as a structural and mythical framework for his love for individual man, exemplified in the largely realistic episodic stories about the individual members of the community. There is therefore no conflict in the two levels of meaning in the novel. Rather, myth and allegory informs and reinforces the emotional push of incident, and is organic to the thematic organisation of the novel. Conversely, we are emotionally convinced of the author's mythical truths about society as a whole, through our involvement with his

highly individualistic protagonists.

By contrast, in Sweet Thursday, the dichotomy in Steinbeck has become polarised as two conflicting and aesthetically divisive themes. Because the community is no longer the single subject of the novel as it was in Cannery Row, Steinbeck's continuing thematic emphasis on communal man is in conflict with the theme of the ultimate loneliness of the individual. In addition, the strong plot-line, tracing the story of Doc's loneliness and his love-affair with Suzy, is at odds with Steinbeck's sustained emphasis on the social behaviour of the other main characters, and the vestiges that remain, of social criticism.

Strangely, where Steinbeck concentrates single-mindedly on one facet of his artistic vision, he is least effective as a writer of fiction. The Moon Is Down, unlike Sweet Thursday, displays a formal perfection lacking in the latter novel. However, the characters in The Moon Is Down fail to be more than a flat embodiment of Steinbeck's biological theories about man, many of which he had already so clearly expounded in The Log From The Sea of Cortez. Thus, although all three novels embody the concept that the people are strong, and the corresponding idea that the individual's power is in the unity of the group, in The Moon Is Down this concept becomes an abstraction.

In conclusion, perhaps the most interesting feature to emerge from this study of social interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon Is Down, is the extent to which Steinbeck's success as a writer is dependent on the aesthetic maintenance of the opposing tensions inherent in his view of social man. Cannery Row exemplifies the way in which Steinbeck's best work is neither clinical observation, nor impassioned argument, but dramatic and exploratory: an aesthetically unified pattern of seemingly conflicting ideas.

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of Steinbeck's fiction lies the assumption that a meaningful understanding of man derives from a consideration of his relationship to society. Furthermore, Steinbeck's abiding concern is the relationship between the individual and the group. This study therefore centres on the social interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon is Down. It focusses in particular on the relationship between Steinbeck's concern for society at large, and his preference for the strongly independent individual. 'Character' is thus defined essentially in functional terms.

There is a dichotomy inherent in Steinbeck's view of social man. Given his belief in, and love for, the individual, it is clearly paradoxical that his novels should place so much stress on man as a group animal, or biological unit. This dichotomy in Steinbeck's work reflects a basic tension between Steinbeck the engaged artist, and Steinbeck the biologist. Study of the social interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon Is Down reveals the way in which this tension can be either a strength or a weakness, artistically.

In Cannery Row, Steinbeck achieves an aesthetically satisfying fusion of the two poles of his thought. His biological interest in the communal animal acts as a structural and mythical framework for his love for individual man, which finds expression in the affectionate episodic stories about individual members of the community. There is therefore no conflict in the two levels of meaning in the novel. Rather, myth and allegory informs and reinforces the emotional push of incident, and is organic to the thematic organisation of the novel. Conversely, we are emotionally convinced of the author's mythical truths about society as a whole, through our involvement with his highly individualistic protagonists.

By contrast, in Sweet Thursday, the dichotomy in Steinbeck has become polarised as two conflicting and aesthetically divisive themes. Because the community is no longer the single subject of the novel as it was in Cannery Row, Steinbeck's continuing thematic emphasis on communal man is in conflict with the theme of the ultimate loneliness of the individual. In addition, the strong plot-line, tracing the story of Doc's love-affair with Suzy, is at odds with Steinbeck's sustained emphasis on the social behaviour of the other main characters, and with the weak vestiges of his once-powerful social criticism.

In The Moon Is Down, Steinbeck concentrates on one facet of his artistic vision. This novel is based on many of the ideas developed in The Log From The Sea of Cortez. The result is an aesthetically unified novel of formal perfection, the effectiveness of which is marred by the fact that his characters fail to be more than a flat and abstract embodiment of his biological theories about man.

The most important feature to emerge from this study of social interdependence of character in Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, and The Moon Is Down is thus the extent to which Steinbeck's strengths as a writer are linked to the successful aesthetic maintenance of the opposing tensions inherent to his view of social man.