TECHNIQUES OF HUMOUR IN THE WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

by

CORNELL STEPHEN PAYERLE

B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1963

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1966
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date December 3, 1965
ABSTRACT

An analysis of John Steinbeck's humour leads to a better understanding of the author and his career. Steinbeck uses humour most often to characterize, to control his distance from his material, to intensify his serious passages, and to satirize. The study of his humour helps to solve the problems presented in his writing. His variety of forms, a result of his versatility and experimentation, is to some extent determined by his oscillation between humorous and serious treatments of subject matter. The fluctuation between serious and humorous works depends to a great extent on his degree of concern for his subject, while the inconsistency in the quality of his writing, as well as the inconsistency in the quality and quantity of his humour, is directly related to his degree of familiarity with his materials.

Chapter One is a statement of the critical opinions of Steinbeck's humour.

In Chapter Two the tradition of American humour is considered. The shaping of the national character is seen as a manifestation of national humour. The three main national characters are traced through from the American Revolution to the time of Mark Twain, when they emerged as elements of society. These elements are traced through to the present day with emphasis on Steinbeck's manipulation of them in his creation of humour.

Chapter Three defines the qualities found in humour, then isolates humour from related modes. A definition of general
areas of humour is followed by a definition of literary forms dependent on humour and by a discussion of techniques for the creation of humour.

Chapter Four, a descriptive analysis of the humour in Steinbeck's works, attempts to determine the quality of the humour and to discover what types of humour predominate. Steinbeck's combination of the general areas of humour, his use of a variety of literary forms, and his utilization of different techniques are discussed. It is concluded that satire is the most persistent and the most successful element in his humour.

Chapter Five deals with Steinbeck's uses of humour: to characterize, to control the distance from his material, to intensify the force of serious passages, and to satirize.

In Chapter Six the chronology of the works, both fiction and non-fiction, is traced in order to determine the pattern of his humour. Issues which are serious but not crucial he tends to treat humorously, while those which are urgent he treats seriously. The relationship between the success of the writing, the success of the humour, and the author's familiarity with his materials is examined.

In Chapter Seven a number of conclusions are reached. The fluctuations in the quality of Steinbeck's writing are directly related to his degree of familiarity with his materials. When he is remote from his subject matter there is a decline both in his artistry and in the quality of his humour. It is natural for him to view his material humorously, but crucial issues demand serious treatment. Although his tendency to experiment caused him
to treat a wide range of topics, Steinbeck writes basically about America. He expresses himself through a natural sense of humour yet his writing pertains to the American scene in a way indicative of his concern as a humanist.
CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii

Chapter One: Critical Remarks on Steinbeck's Humour .... 1

Chapter Two: The American Tradition of Humour ............ 21

Chapter Three: Definitions ................................................................. 42

Chapter Four: An Analysis of Steinbeck's Humour ............ 62

Chapter Five: Steinbeck's Uses of Humour ......................... 100

Chapter Six: A Chronological Study of Steinbeck's Humour 113

Chapter Seven: Conclusion ............................................................... 130

Notes: Chapter One ................................................................. 135

Chapter Two ................................................................. 138

Chapter Three ................................................................. 139

Chapter Four ................................................................. 140

Chapter Five ................................................................. 143

Chapter Six ................................................................. 144

Chapter Seven ................................................................. 145

Appendix I: Key to Abbreviated Titles ......................... 146

Bibliography ................................................................. 147
Chapter One
Critical Remarks on Steinbeck's Humour

"Myths form quickly, and I want no tag of humorist on me, nor any other kind," wrote John Steinbeck to his agents shortly after success came to him through *Tortilla Flat*. In the following thirty years, Steinbeck has retained his tagless status by writing ten novels, four play-novelettes, a number of short stories, five documentaries, dozens of articles and war communiques, and three film scripts. The wide range of form and the versatility within each form allow him only the tag of experimentalist, to which he undoubtedly would not object. Yet in all his variety and versatility there is the basic theme of concern for all living things which entitles him also to the tag of humanist. And bound to his humanism is his characteristic humour which appears so often in his work, yet fluctuates so violently both in quantity and quality that it has not been considered sufficiently important to merit extensive study.

Steinbeck's humour is interesting because in it he is as versatile as in his form. He can sustain it throughout an entire novel, as he does in *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday*, and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, use it to counterpoint serious events, as in *Of Mice and Men*, or isolate it in short passages within a serious narrative, as in *The Red Pony*. He can use humour to ridicule modern civilization, as in *Cannery Row* and
The Short Reign of Pippin IV, to assist in creating a full character, as he does with Doc in Cannery Row and with Ethan Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent, to establish distance between himself and subjects which he is in danger of sentimentalizing, as he does with the paisanos in Tortilla Flat, and to render impersonal material more palatable, as he does with his biological theories in Sea of Cortez.

Yet a consideration of Steinbeck's humour creates more than mere interest, for it provides solutions to some of the problems evident in the body of his work. His humour seems to follow no visible trend. Although it occurs infrequently in his first three novels, it dominates Tortilla Flat, then appears and disappears seemingly without pattern. This fluctuation of tone between the serious and the humorous in the chronological order of his works relates to the problems arising out of his versatility of form, which has caused many critics to view Steinbeck as a 'single work success' who cashed in on the topical content of The Grapes of Wrath. A few see his versatility as an indication that he has not found the right medium through which to express himself.\textsuperscript{2}

There is a great deal of inconsistency, not only in the quantity of Steinbeck's humour, but also in the quality. At times it is superb, as in Cannery Row and Of Mice and Men, yet it can be nauseatingly adolescent, as in his juvenilia written in university, and in The Short Reign of Pippin IV. Also, there is often a direct relationship between the quality of humour and the success of the work itself, as in the successful Of Mice and
Men, and the unsuccessful *The Moon is Down*, and between the quantity of humour and Steinbeck's attitude toward his material. Little has been offered to explain the fluctuation of quality and quantity of his humour.

There has been, of course, a great deal of critical evaluation of Steinbeck's works, yet there has been nothing, not even an article, dealing exclusively with his humour. Most critical comments on his humour are incidental to other areas of study. This is odd, considering the amount of his writing that is humorous. Perhaps the explanation can be found in E. B. White's statement concerning the general attitude toward humour: "if a thing is funny it can be presumed to be something less than great, because if it were truly great it would be wholly serious." Most critics seem to agree with White's statement, although a few, like Peter Lisca and Warren French, have discovered that Steinbeck uses humour skilfully for purposes other than mere entertainment. It is unfortunate that more attention has not been paid to Steinbeck's humour, for an understanding of the humorous in his writing leads to a fuller appreciation of the general problems concerning his work.

It is most convenient to consider Steinbeck's works according to five chronological phases in order to study the criticism of his humour. The first phase includes his adolescent writing and the experimentation to "find himself," which ended with the writing of *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932). Included in this period is *To a God Unknown* (1933), which was published after, but written before, *The Pastures of Heaven*. The eight insignificant
poems published in the Monterey Beacon under the pseudonym, Amnesia Glasscock, in January, 1935, must also be included in this period. The second phase, from Tortilla Flat (1935) to The Moon is Down (1942), consists mainly of social protest.

In the third, from Cannery Row (1945) to The Wayward Bus (1947), Steinbeck struggles to withstand materialism in the face of prosperity. The fourth phase, from Burning Bright (1950) to The Short Reign of Pippin IV (1957), is the decline of his artistry. A return to his earlier artistic success is promised in the last phase. In The Winter of Our Discontent (1961) he "attempts a comeback to serious adult fiction."

The other work in this phase is Travels with Charley in Search of America (1962), which is not exactly "serious adult fiction," but which is written with more assurance than most of his work of the previous phase.

There is little critical evaluation of the humour in Steinbeck's first phase. His adolescent writings, consisting of two stories and three poems in Stanford University periodicals are mentioned by Lisca as being comic satire. Lisca goes on to say that Steinbeck's "interest in burlesque and satire is carried into some of [his] mature work--Cannery Row, The Grapes of Wrath..., The Wayward Bus, Sweet Thursday, and especially 'St. Katy the Virgin'; but it becomes a strategic humor, devoid of undergraduate preciosity and developed in terms of earthy realism of symbolic reference." There are few comments on the humour of Steinbeck's early novels. Warren French speaks of "the satiric intentions of Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, and perhaps even To a God
In discussing *Cup of Gold* (1929), Harry Thornton Moore states: "The portrait [of Morgan] is not done without humor, and [he] seems an amusingly romantic liar." "St. Katy the Virgin" was also written during this period, although it was not published until 1936. Lisca calls it "a goliardic farce in the best fabliau tradition....The story is rife with hilarious parodies of medieval arguments." ([WWJS](#), p. 94) French speaks of it as "written in the mannered, facetious style [Steinbeck] abandoned with the coming depression. It is perhaps regrettable that he abandoned this style, for he excels as a satirist....The story culminates in a cynical burlesque of religious expedience." ([p. 87f.](#)) F. W. Watt says it is an "attempt in the beast-epic genre, using the licence of that form in matters of fantasy and satire....The bawdry and buffoonery relate most obviously, however, to the relaxed morality and the mock-heroic tone of *Tortilla Flat*." The only other critical reference to Steinbeck's humour in this phase is to the poems published in the *Monterey Beacon*, which Lisca feels were "in the same vein as his Stanford pieces." ([SHC](#), p. 11)

Steinbeck's humour in the second phase of his writing evoked a great deal of comment. The surprising change from the serious tone of his first three novels to the humorous tone of *Tortilla Flat* gave rise to much discussion. More has been written on the humour in this novel than on that in any of his other works. The comments vary from "rococo comedy, ironic and romantic, ornate and mannered," and "gay, irresponsible, charming," to "drolly as it is written, [it] is primarily a
tragedy, a dark epic of the defeat of the anarchical personality." (French, p. 61) This last is qualified by the statement: "Yet it is comic since self-destruction of disorder is a step toward the triumph of order." Oddly enough, the only other mention of *Tortilla Flat* as a tragicomedy is made by Steinbeck himself when he refers to "its tragicomic theme."^{12} Moore, in his discussion of the novel, feels that Steinbeck "had never so fully exhibited his own comic talent....*Tortilla Flat* is a new kind of American comedy, concerned with 'natives' of an unusual kidney, the *paisanos.*" (p. 35f.) Lincoln Gibbs calls the novel "an extra-vaganza, with a good deal of slapstick comedy, a touch of parody (of the *Morte d'Arthur*), and many examples of the author's innuendo."^{13} Many critics agree that *Tortilla Flat* is a mock-epic based on Malory's *Morte d'Arthur.*^{14}

Some critics see the humour of *Tortilla Flat* as unsuccessful. To Alfred Kazin, the *paisanos* are "hard to take" because of "their undiluted cuteness." (p. 398) Maxwell Geismar feels that the humour has a "faintly adolescent tone," and that Steinbeck "glides rather too easily along the surface of its paisano life. Even the epic of 'tall-tales,' as in 'John Henry' itself, has beneath it the undertones of tragedy and human loss, and for the most part Steinbeck avoids this in his narration." However, he is more tolerant when he goes on to say that the novel is reminiscent "of a merger of the folk epics of John Henry and Paul Bunyan, fusing the negro's ease with the lumberjack's exploits."^{15}

But many critics praise Steinbeck's change to the humorous
vein. Frederic Carpenter states that where "Cup of Gold had failed through lack of a sense of humor, Tortilla Flat succeeds through possession of this quality." (SHC, p. 74) French says that "socially conscious critics missed its ironic humor and attacked it as a sentimental defense of vagabondage." (p. 23) Watt feels that Steinbeck "expanded into the comic with a burst of energy which suggests a long-subdued attitude and a new confidence with respect to technique and subject-matter." (p. 38) Barker Fairley states that the success of the novel stems in part from the stylized speech, which helps "to create poetic illusion in which the low and even vulgar comedy of the tales becomes plausible." He continues that most "writers of comedy--and this book alone among the Steinbeck achievements is essentially comedy--cultivate some elaboration of speech so as to cover over what should not be clearly seen. Steinbeck achieves a similar effect by simplifying [the language of the paisanos]." Beach refers to specific incidents as being funny. He sees the episode of the vacuum cleaner and the story of the Pirate as such, but he makes an important qualification when he continues: "There is much more than humor here, and the book shows throughout a genuine love for the charm and virtue of these childlike paisanos.... [Steinbeck] has invested his tale with the tender pathos of distance." (SHC, p. 89) Lisca and T. K. Whipple also comment on the distancing effect of the novel's humour. Lisca feels that the humour inherent in "the burlesque of epic language and action...enables the author to keep his characters at an aesthetic distance." (WWJS, p. 91) Whipple, the first to have spoken of
this aspect, says of Steinbeck's style: "Proper distance...is the secret of [its] effect—to place people not too close or too far away....Detachment, of course, is the essential." (p. 274)

Critics see a number of strains in the humour of *Tortilla Flat*. Watt places it in the vein of folk-humour. (p. 51) Some see in it elements of the picaresque. Gibbs finds it an extension of this form when he says, "It is a late addition to picaresque fiction; instead of a single thief, it represents a fraternity of rascals and a slum community." (SHC, p. 95) Joseph Fontenrose observes that in *Tortilla Flat* "Steinbeck's biological point of view becomes explicit, and for the first time he makes deliberate, if humorous, use of the conception of the group as organism."17 Edwin Burgum says of this novel and of *Cannery Row* that the mood might be defined "as the American picaresque, if the emphasis were not less on the sharpness of wit in these vagabonds than on a sentimental admiration for their carefree way of life."18 Beach finds it "a very skillful blend of several varieties of comic writing; it recalls *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* and Anatole France and Charles Lamb." (SHC, p. 86) French says, "Like Mark Twain, but less obviously, [Steinbeck] is burlesquing rather than retelling chivalric legends; and *Tortilla Flat*...carries on and clarifies the satirical intentions of *Cup of Gold*, *The Pastures of Heaven*, and perhaps even *To a God Unknown*." (p. 56)

The satire of *Tortilla Flat* has been recognized by many critics. Gibbs speaks of the novel as "a jolly satire of respectable society." (SHC, p. 96) Lisca sees the humour of various incidents as "light satire on social customs," and "a
satire on the conventional prestige value of possessions." (WWJS, pp. 83, 85) French, who extols Steinbeck for his satire, says, "His desire to satirize pretentious middle-class mediocrities accounts for Steinbeck's exaggerated but somewhat tongue-in-cheek praise of the paisanos...; this satire, however, is sporadic and actually incidental to the main tenor of the work." (p. 56) He goes on to say that some of this incidental satire is directed at the organized church. Then he alludes to the novel's double-edged satire with the statement:

The target of most of the satire is the very group Steinbeck has been accused of glamorous—the indolent barbarians who hope to enjoy benefits of civilization without contributing to it....The point of Tortilla Flat is partially that the way of life of these "bums" is in some ways superior to the average American's and that we might learn something from them; but it is also partially a warning that the simple, close-to-nature life that some men think they long for is not the answer to society's problems either. (p. 56f.)

Steinbeck's next novel, In Dubious Battle (1936), contains such little humour that no one speaks of it. Fontenrose observes of the novel: "Here was no charm or quaintness, here were miseries and struggles almost unrelieved by a humorous touch." (p. 42) It appears that, for most critics, the humour in Of Mice and Men (1937) has been overshadowed by its pathos. The general attitude toward the novelette is voiced by Beach when he says that it is "in a very different vein, as far as possible from the gentle comedy of Tortilla Flat. Of Mice and Men is a tragic story of friendship among migratory laborers." (SHC, p. 90) Rascoe is appalled by the audience's reaction to the play version. He writes that "a distressingly large part of the audience...took the tragic, heart-breaking lines of George and Lennie to be comedy. They
laughed outrageously when tears should have been streaming down their faces. They appeared to think that the lumbering, dimwitted, pathetic Lennie was supposed to be funny." (SHC, p. 59f.) It is true that Lennie is not meant to be funny, but the episodes which Steinbeck creates around him rank among the most humorous in literature, and it is hard to blame the audience for laughing. Watt comes nearest to stating the problem when he observes that "the risible and grotesque elements often make it hard to accept Lennie as the symbol of the 'masses' or 'group-man' he is intended to be." (p. 62) Burgum sees in the novel "the transformation of the picaresque tradition when it comes into contact with the American sensitiveness to the plight of the underprivileged." (SHC, p. 112) As usual, French disagrees with the general opinion. He feels that, despite "the grim events it chronicles Of Mice and Men is not a tragedy, but a comedy--which, if it were Shakespearean, we would call a 'dark comedy'--about the triumph of the indomitable will to survive." (p. 76)

Little has been said of humour in The Long Valley (1938) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939). In The Long Valley there is little humour except for "St. Katy the Virgin," which was written approximately six years before the publication of the collection. The only critical reference to other humour in the book is to "The Harness," which Geismar feels "achieves a genuine folk humor." (p. 263) The few instances of humour in "The Red Pony" receive no comment whatsoever. There is enough humour in The Grapes of Wrath to have elicited more critical comment than it has. Lisca, when discussing a later work, makes a passing reference to the
folk humour of the novel. (WWJS, p. 287) Watt sees in it "some of the earthy humour of Tortilla Flat, which is one of the things the Okies and the paisanos have in common." (p. 63) French refers to "the deft use of bitter satire in...the inter-chapters." (p. 121) Steinbeck himself comments on the satire, not specifically in The Grapes of Wrath, but in its earlier form, announced under the title, L'Affaire Lettuceburg. He wrote to his publisher: "It is bad because it isn't honest....In satire you have to restrict the picture and I just can't do satire." This is an interesting statement by a writer who has used satire either directly or obliquely in more than half of his work.

The last work of fiction in this period is the play-novelette, The Moon is Down, which also drew little critical comment on its humour, even though it contains a considerable amount. The only comment is made by Lisca who, in speaking of the conversation between Annie and Joseph concerning the trial of Alex Morden, says, "Is this supposed to be comic relief? The scene is simply incredible." (WWJS, p. 195) The novel is a failure, and Lisca's comment on the humour voices the general reaction to the entire work.

In 1942, at the end of this phase, Alfred Kazin made a general statement about Steinbeck's works, noting that he had "the necessary detachment and slow curiosity to approach the modern social struggle as a tragicomedy of animal instincts, which...meant an aroused compassion, an understanding of the pain that the human animal can suffer and the mistakes he can make." (p. 395) With less stress on the animality of Steinbeck's
figures, this would be a fairly accurate estimation of the second phase of his work.

The third phase begins with a situation similar to that in the previous phase. Cannery Row is written in a humorous vein much like that of Tortilla Flat, and there is considerable comment on its humour. Again there are the extreme views: Bergum feels that here Steinbeck "lapsed into the amiable superficiality of Tortilla Flat," (SHC, p. 105) and Malcolm Cowley sees the novel as a vicious attack on the middle class. Steinbeck himself calls it a "'pretty mixed-up book'" with "'pretty general ribbing in it.'" Most critics see more than superficial humour in the novel. Lisca states that it is in no sense a repetition of Tortilla Flat....The experience of [the intervening ten] years is in Cannery Row and accounts for the difference in tone between the two books. The detached, amused acceptance of the paisanos of Tortilla Flat gives way in Cannery Row to an active championing of Mac [sic] and the boys. (SHC, p. 17)

Yet he sees a number of parallels between the two novels. He observes that the structure of both novels is loose and episodic....Also both novels have as protagonists a tight little group with its own moral standards; and...in both novels this group is made up not so much of social outcasts as of individuals who have retreated from society. In both novels the structure and mores of this little group serve as commentaries on the structure and mores of that society which they have abandoned. (WWJS, p. 54)

George Snell sees Cannery Row as a return to Steinbeck's "most satisfactory manner,...the great distinction and real value [of which] lie in the warm humanity suffusing it, and the humor--Dickensian, but with twentieth-century frankness." Watt speaks of it as "a book which on the surface is the most gay,
irresponsible and rollicking of all Steinbeck's novels...[but] the discrepancy between surface gaiety and the underlying moods... is great." (p. 79) He sees it as "a satire, at times a vicious satire, on contemporary American life," delivered by the vehicle of "broad comedy, bawdiness, and gaiety." (pp. 80, 84)

The intensity of the satire in *Cannery Row* is indicated by Malcolm Cowley's suggestion that it might be a "'poisoned cream puff.'" Steinbeck's own remarks about the novel are contradictory. In 1945 he said of Cowley's comment that, had he reread it, "'he would have found out how very poisoned it was.'" In the same year he wrote that "'people are rushing to send it overseas to soldiers. Apparently they think of it as a relief from war.'" Yet in 1953 he wrote that it was "'a kind of nostalgic thing written for a group of soldiers who had said to me 'Write something funny that isn't about the war.'" The tone of the novel itself indicates that the earlier statements are the more accurate. French assesses the novel correctly in the statement: "The enemy Steinbeck attacks--the destructive force that preys on the world--is...respectability: the desire to attain an unnatural security for one's self by ruthlessly disregarding the feelings of others." (p. 120)

In *The Pearl* (1947) there is little that can be called humorous. The bitter satire, presented through the doctor, the priest and the pearl buyers, is not discussed in any of the critical works. The humour in *The Wayward Bus* has occasioned a few critical comments. Bernard De Voto says that "as narrative it is superb...as comedy it is excellent; as novel it is
satisfying and no more." In his review of the novel, Carlos Baker feels that Steinbeck is prevented "from swinging completely over into savage indignation...[by] a saving sense of humor and a deep sense of pity." For Lisca the novel contains a "terrible Swiftian humor." (WWJS, p. 287) Watt notes the diversity of elements in the novel: "satiric, ironic, romantic, comic, pathetic, bathetic." (p. 91)

Near the end of this phase of Steinbeck's writing, a number of general statements concerning his humour were made. Harry Slochower finds that his "work is, on the whole, filled with cheer and humour." Snell sees Steinbeck similar to Dickens in, among other things, his "love of exaggeration and a resulting humor, and a basic sentimentalism which results in the gravest weakness of both [authors]." (p. 187f.) It was also at this time that critics began to classify Steinbeck's works. Lisca observes that by 1947 critics had begun to classify them into three main areas: social protest (In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, The Forgotten Village); quaint and picturesque comedy (Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row); and simple rural life (The Pastures of Heaven, The Long Valley, The Pearl, The Red Pony). Cup of Gold and To a God Unknown were conveniently forgotten. Because The Wayward Bus did not seem to fit into any of these areas,...most critics seemed confused about the book. (WWJS, p. 231f.)

There is considerable comment on Steinbeck's humour during the phase of his decline, for in this period he produced two extended works of humour—the comedy, Sweet Thursday (1954), and the satire, The Short Reign of Pippin IV. Neither of the other two works of this period, the play-novelette, Burning Bright and the ambitious novel, East of Eden (1952), evoked comment on
humour. In the case of *Burning Bright* this is so because there is only one minor statement in it that can be called humorous.\(^{29}\) There is some humour in *East of Eden*, but nothing has been said of it, probably because it seems to have little bearing on the great moral theme generally attributed to the novel. The one comment which does bear on the study of Steinbeck's humour is made by Arthur Mizener, who says that most of the characters "are comic-strip illustrations of Steinbeck's moral." He continues:

There is evidence even in *East of Eden* of what is quite clear from Steinbeck's earlier work, that so long as he sticks to animals and children and to situations he can see to some purpose from the point of view of his almost biological feeling for the continuity of life he can release the considerable talent and sensitivity which are naturally his. As soon as he tries to see adult experience in the usual way and to find the familiar kind of moral in it, the insight and talent cease to work and he writes like the author of any third-rate best-seller.\(^{30}\)

*Sweet Thursday* gets little praise from critics, either for theme or for humour. Lisca gives the general attitude toward it when he says, "Because *Sweet Thursday* was written in the spirit of modern musical comedy, it is unrewarding to subject it to those criteria of formal analysis applied to major literature." (WWJS, p. 278) Tedlock and Wickers feel that it "seems to have impressed most reviewers as a disappointing reversion to the vein of *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*....Even a reviewer who was willing to acknowledge that Steinbeck knew the people he was writing about and had the gift for low comedy, talked of a romantic streak that was perilously close to being cute and that was saved only by the rowdy humor and the satire."\(^{31}\) French admits the novel's failure, which he attributes to Steinbeck's loss of
contact with his California experience, but, as usual, respects its satire. (p. 162) Watt also sees the novel as inconsequential. For him its "bitter-tasting amoral humour" is in the same mood as Cannery Row, (p. 15) but instead of the "cutting edge" of the earlier novel there is "a kind of zany musical comedy charm." (p. 101) He feels that "the world of Sweet Thursday does not exist on the same level of reality as the earlier work, where such playfulness would be out of the question." (p. 100)

Not all of the criticism of Sweet Thursday is adverse, however. Charles Metzger views the novel as a modern pastoral in which Steinbeck's attitude "is essentially the expansive, the generous, the aesthetic attitude...characteristic of the pastoral." Hugh Holman sees it as not merely a "minor episode in an erratic career." He feels that "however thin and unconvincing its central situation is, [it] does make an emphatic and clear-cut statement of Steinbeck's greatest single theme; the common bonds of humanity and love which make goodness and happiness possible." He states further, and this is also in Steinbeck's favour, that "the tone of half-disparaging banter often seems directed against the author himself." It is Holman, too, who states most succinctly the extent of Steinbeck's versatility. "He has appeared to be a naturalist...and a celebrator of the simple joys of life; the author of effective social propaganda and of mystically symbolic and wry comic parallels...a writer of picaresque comedy or of romantic parables." (p. 18)

The Short Reign of Pippin IV merits and receives even less praise than Sweet Thursday. Lisca sees it as further evidence
of Steinbeck's state of decline. (WWJS, p. 288) Harry Thornton Moore, in his review, calls it "a gentle comedy superficially amusing for a while; but long before its...last page, it begins to pall." He goes on to say that it is "masquerading as epigram," and, "[a]s for satire, surely Steinbeck is too soft-hearted for the medium."34 Another reviewer states: "The satiric lapses into the pontifical."35 To Woodress, "it is a joke carried on much too long and at the level of a college humor magazine." (p. 395)

In comparing the humour of the novel to that in the body of Steinbeck's works, Lisca says that it "is not that burlesque humor of Tortilla Flat, that Rabelaisian humor of 'St. Katy the Virgin,' that folk humor of The Grapes of Wrath, that tender humor of Cannery Row, that terrible Swiftian humor of The Wayward Bus; and it is nothing as good. It is a sophomoric humor of grotesque improbability and wordplay." (WWJS, p. 287) Fontenrose observes that in "this comedy,...farce, punctuated with sententious statements, frequently descends to slapstick." (p. 130) In speaking of both Sweet Thursday and Pippin, he says that the "two extravaganzas may...be considered mere jeux d’esprits in which the gaiety seems rather forced." (p. 132)

Not all critics are harsh in evaluating Pippin. Watt calls it a "sophisticated intellectual comedy,...[which] permits a number of satirical thrusts." (p. 101) For him the "vein of broad comedy [which runs through Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday] comes more fully to the surface than before, but the greater fluency and sophistication of this book hardly compensates for the loss in earthiness, and particularly in genuine idiom."
French disagrees with the general opinion that Pippin is the lowest point of Steinbeck's career, saying that "it represents...a perceptible change for the better." He states:

The novel shows again, as The Wayward Bus had, that Steinbeck cannot quite square his non-teleological observation that people are simply what they are with his transcendental desire that they improve themselves. He has still not decided whether his primary allegiance is to science or satire. But in Pippin [sic] he comes closer than in any of his previous books to recognizing that since men are what they are, they must become conscious of their present status and change, if they can at all, after recognizing where they are starting from. (p. 168f.)

Of the two books in the last phase of Steinbeck's work, only The Winter of Our Discontent can be classed as fiction, and therefore it has received more critical attention than Travels with Charley, which is viewed generally as one of "the dullest travelogues ever to acquire the respectability of a hard cover." Most American critics showed little liking for The Winter of Our Discontent, but European critics had much more enthusiasm for it—enough to find in it the basis for awarding Steinbeck the Nobel Prize for Literature. The fact that it is a savage satire on American morality may account for this difference of opinion. The reviewer for Harper's Magazine feels that the book has "the tone and atmosphere of lighthearted suburban domestic comedy, quite inappropriate to the seriousness of the theme." Granville Hicks speaks of the protagonist as "often amusing in a whimsical way." Fontenrose says that Steinbeck "seems to be trying too hard for profundity or beauty or humor, often descending to the merely tasteless." (p. 137)

But not all American criticism is adverse. One reviewer states:
"With his technique of understatement and his progressively insidious development of deteriorating standards, both individual and collective, the author adds considerably to his stature as an authoritative commentator on American life. His new novel is certain to be rated with his finest work.\(^{40}\) Neither are all European critics favourable. The reviewer for *The Listener* calls it "an elaborately pretentious and portentous parody of all the other books about the little man."\(^{41}\) Another English critic writes, under the derogatory title, "Looking After Number One," that "the reader could well have been spared...at least some of [the] conversations with the groceries," but concedes that "Mr. Steinbeck has one or two good comic scenes."\(^{42}\) The reviewer for *Time and Tide* praises Steinbeck, giving the general European attitude in his statement: "the warm humanity and inconsequential humour...elevates each individual page and...serves to bring his characters so vividly to life."\(^{43}\) The Swedish Academy chose Steinbeck for the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature "principally for his novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*...which marked a return after two decades to the 'towering standard' he had set with *The Grapes of Wrath*...and other works of that period." The award was presented for his "'realistic and imaginative writings distinguished...by a sympathetic humor and a social perception.'"\(^{44}\)

The little that has been said of the humour in *Travels with Charley* is not complimentary. Woodress calls it "an embarrassing book for anyone fond of the early Steinbeck," and feels it is "a witty, entertaining, but shallow travelogue,...a pot-boiling disappointment." (p. 397) Fontenrose describes it as "a series
of selected incidents and encounters, sometimes entertaining or amusing." (p. 138) One critic says of Charley, "He is an arresting dog, but his urinating habits are hardly cause for humble philosophizing....Thus humility becomes absurdity." The book is praised by only a few critics, eliciting such comments as "pure delight," "a fine, generous, loving book," and "moving along with Steinbeck in this mood is a very pleasant experience." The reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement says that Steinbeck "becomes the chief character of his Travels, Charley is his Fool,...[in this] sketch of a writer in search of material." This critic has the insight to say that Steinbeck's "deepest impressions of modern America will probably not be put on paper until he has had more time to digest his experiences for future novels." The attitude of critics toward Steinbeck's humour has varied from animosity to praise. Yet discussion of it is always secondary to criticism of other aspects of his work. The considerable amount of humour in his non-fiction, both articles and books, is hardly mentioned. The humour in these alone reveals a great deal about their author. A study of the humour in the body of Steinbeck's work, both fiction and non-fiction, leads to greater understanding of the author whose "career has been one of the most baffling in recent literary history." (Holman, p. 18)
Chapter Two
The American Tradition of Humour

Just as it is necessary to consider the literary tradition in which an author is writing in order to properly assess his works, so it is necessary to study the tradition of humour which lies behind an author before attempting to analyze his humour. John Steinbeck, born eight years before the death of Mark Twain, America's greatest humorist, viewed America for almost forty years from its most southwestern state, writing in simple, rural terms and with an earthy, natural humour. As a twentieth-century Californian writer, he was able to draw on almost two hundred years of traditional American humour based, for the most part, on the writing of former regionalists whose literature contained the "American sense of humor." For where Europeans felt that simple humour connoted a lack of sophistication, Americans extolled simple humour as a manifestation of the new country's unpretentiousness. And the down-to-earth attitude, the "unique attribute, found in [America]...alone," grew out of a desire to shed all traces of European pompousness.

It can be said that the forces which shaped the United States of America also shaped its humour. The American Revolution served to break all political ties between Britain and America and to give independence to the United States. Naturally ties other than political were broken and it is natural that a humour distinctly different from that in Britain should emerge in the new country. In humour, as in so many other spheres, the Americans broke away
from British tradition in an attempt to become national and original. Constance Rourke sees the shaping of national character as a manifestation of national humour in the new country:

By the end of the Revolution the small United States had emerged as Brother Johathon, an out-at-elbows New England country boy with short coat-sleeves, shrunken trousers, and a blank countenance. In the following years of inflated triumph the quiet, uncouth Yankee lad was often innocently put forward as a national symbol [for] by a sudden still agreement the unformed American nation pictured itself as homely and comic."

This self-portraiture of the American which was created originally in a pure attempt at self-assertion, underwent change and addition due in part to a need for retaliation against descriptions of the American presented by people of other countries, especially against the unflattering picture which the British traveller gave to the world. The more the British labelled the American plain, uncultured and ill-mannered, the more the American sneered at the old-country citizens for their pompousness and pretentiousness. Gradually a change took place. Not only did the American begin to admit his plainness and lack of culture, but he gradually became proud of it and, finally, insisted upon it as a national attribute. This change was in part affected by, and in part responsible for, the emergence of the Yankee as a distinct character. At first he was merely a Yankee Jonathon, but as he insisted ever louder on his own uniqueness he became the loquacious Yankee of Rourke's apt description:

He was consistently a mythical figure; he appeared in the forms of expression taken by myth, in cycles of short tales, fables and plays. Plain and pawky, he was an ideal image, a self-image, one of those symbols which peoples spontaneously adopt and by which in some measure they live. Over-assertive yet quiet, self-conscious, full of odd new
biases, he talked—this mythical creature: that was one secret of his power....His slanting dialect, homely metaphor, the penetrating rhythms of his speech, gave a fillip toward the upset of old and rigid balances; creating laughter, he also created a fresh sense of unity. He ridiculed old values; the persistent contrast with the British showed part of his intention; to some extent he created new ones. He was a symbol of triumph, of adaptability, of irrepressible life—of many qualities needed to induce confidence and self-possession among new and unamalgamated people. (p. 30f.)

The Yankee, recreated by different authors, appeared in various forms. There were suggestions of the type in Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard and most of the almanacs of the late eighteenth century incorporated the Yankee traits in anecdotal form. (NAH, pp. 18, 19) Following the character of the local Yankee created by Yankee Hill—George Handel Hill (Rourke, p. 18)—there was Seba Smith's politically satiric Jack Downing, (NAH, p. 39f.) Thomas Chandler Haliburton's Canadian version of the Yankee—Sam Slick of The Clockmaker, (NAH, p. 43) James Russell Lowell's Hezekiah Biglow, (NAH, 43f.) and dozens of lesser-known figures. From an embodiment of general American traits, the Yankee figure gradually evolved into two opposing strains. The sophisticated class, emerging in the cities, rejected the coarse, homely traits, considering them applicable only to rural people. The contest, then, shifted its emphasis from an opposition between American and British to one between the rural and the urban in America. The appearance of the Yankee also underwent change. He exchanged his threadbare jacket for a blue coat with long tails, his shrunken pants for red and white striped trousers, and he wore a tall white hat. As his changing names—Brother Jonathon, Jonathon Slick, Sam Slick, Sam Patch—indicate, the original
Yankee finally emerged as Uncle Sam.

While the Yankee character was evolving in the East, a new national figure was being created further inland. "Like the Yankee in the Revolution the backwoodsman had leapt up out of war as a noticeable figure—the War of 1812; in the scattered western country his portrait had taken shape slowly." (Rourke, p. 35f.) He had taken shape slowly for the shaping process had involved the slow blending of several elements: the Kentucky pioneer, the flatboatman, and the westward-moving frontiersman. He was unlike the Yankee in appearance for he wore "buckskin shirt and leggings, moccasins and fur cap, with a rifle on his shoulder." (Rourke, p. 34f.) But he equalled, if not excelled, the Yankee in loquaciousness:

Strength was his obsession—size, scale, power: he seemed obliged to shout their symbols as if after all he were not wholly secure in their possession. He shouted as though he were intoxicated by shouting. He shouted in ritual, as though the emotions by which he was moved were bending him to some primitive celebration. (Rourke, p. 36f.)

This figure, like the Yankee, appeared in many variations and under many names. There were Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, actual men who became legendary frontier figures in their own lifetime. James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking was another frontiersman. An account of Mike Pink, "known in legend as the first flatboatman who dared to take a broadhorn over the Falls of the Ohio," (Rourke, p. 53) will serve to show not only how the boatman was incorporated into the frontiersman figure but also to indicate how a real man could be changed into a legend which, varied and embellished, evolved into myth.
Mike Fink passed into legend not only because of his early exploits on the rivers but because he was the last of the boatmen....

He was in fact a Mississippi river-god, one of those minor deities whom men create in their own image and magnify to magnify themselves. Gradually he grew supersized....He became Mike Finch, Mike Finx, Mike Wing, in a hundred minor tales. Driven at last from the Mississippi, he moved into the unknown regions of the farther West, achieving the final glory of heroes, a death wrapped in mystery, indeed many deaths, for the true story was lost, and others sprang up. (Rourke, p. 54f.)

As the Yankee symbolized the spirit of the new country freed from British ties, so the backwoodsman stood for the spirit of a new civilization, that which, as it moved west, severed bonds with Eastern America. Both supplied laughter and created the sense of unity needed in the expanding country. But there was still another facet in the new society which figured importantly in the national character of America. This was the Negro.

"The Negro was to be seen everywhere in the South and in the new Southwest, on small farms and great plantations, on roads and levees. He was often an all but equal member of many pioneering expeditions. He became...a dominant figure in spite of his condition, and commanded a definite portraiture." (Rourke, p. 79) This portrait, when it was drawn, combined the natural traits of the Negro in the South with traits attributed to him by northern entertainers such as Jim Crow Rice, who opened the way to Negro minstrelsy. (Rourke, p. 80) Consequently, the Negro appeared either as a comical outcast (Jim Crow, Dan Tucker), or as a folksy philosopher like Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus. In either case, the appeal of the Negro, as a national figure, lay in his primitive qualities—his spirituals, his bird and animal fables, his mode of story-telling, and his simplicity of life.
That the three characters tended to merge—the Yankee with the backwoodsman, the Yankee with the Negro, and the Negro with the backwoodsman (Rourke, pp. 72, 80, 85)—indicates that they had strong factors in common. All three used vernacular speech; exaggeration was natural to them all; each provided ready material for satire. Thus, literary pieces dealing with any of the three were likely to contain a combination of colloquialism, exaggeration and satire, for these were the common elements. Hosea Biglow begins a letter:

MR. EDITER, As i wuz kinder prunin round, in a little nursry sot out a year or 2 a go, the Dbaht in the sennit cum inter my mine. An so i took & Sot it to wut I call a nursry rime. I hev made sum ognable Gentlemun speak in a Kind uv Poetikul lie sense,\footnote{5} and Colonel Crockett speaks thus in his stump speech:

"Yes, gentlemen, he may get some votes by grimming, for he can out grin me, and you know I ain't slow--and to prove to you that I am not, I will tell you an anecdote.\footnote{6}

In these examples, colloquial speech and satire are evident. In the stories of Uncle Remus, with their dialect of the Southern-plantation Negro—"and wid dat Brer Rabbit gallop off home. En Brer Fox ain't never kotch 'im yet, en w'at's mo', honey, he ain't gwineter\footnote{7}—it is necessary to be aware of the allegorical implications before the satire can be appreciated.

Although exaggeration can be found in isolated passages in stories of the Yankee, the backwoodsman or the Negro, it is usually discovered to be such an integral part of the tall tale that the two have become almost synonymous. It is the tall tale, then, which combines the elements common to the three American characters for it usually contains dialect and satire as well as
exaggeration.

The first recorded examples of the American tall tale are in a book by the Reverend Samuel Peters who, during the Revolution, wrote what he termed a history of Connecticut. Since the Western tall tale did not rise to its peak until the period from 1835 to 1860, "Peters stands as something of a prophet," who was aware that "such humor was destined to flourish on any new American frontier." (Rourke, p. 33) For, as Daniel Hoffman intimates, "the tall tale was one of the "metaphors of swaggering self-assertion and indomitable mastery of fate" which gave expression to "the unrefined individualistic energy of popular culture--barbarous and bestial as it sometimes was." Evidence that it was linked to the garden myth are the inflated reports by Western settlers of the fertility of the soil or of the excess of game in their frontier regions. (Hoffman, pp. 17, 18) A variety of attitudes and convictions are reflected in the adaptable tall tale. With a touch of irony to indicate the superiority of the settler, it became a hoax or a practical joke, thus implying a sort of initiation for the newcomer, or, it could take the form of the noodle story--an exaggeration of the scorn of the settled farmer for the newcomer--or it could be a reversed tall tale which exaggerated the facts of adversity. Sometimes it was the cataloguing of a man's feats of strength or endurance. (Hoffman, pp. 20-23) Some stressed the supernatural; (Rourke, p. 67) others were more prosaic. But whatever form they took, "within these tales character and custom...were portrayed with such close and ready detail as to provide something of a record of the time and place." (Rourke, p. 69f.)
In Walter Blair's terms, the tall tale may be seen as the fictional technique which revealed the American scene and character. He sums up the situation as it was early in American literature:

Even after the writers of America became sufficiently detached...before the characteristic writings of American humorists could appear, two developments were necessary; the development of perception of the comic possibilities of the American scene and American character, and the development of a fictional technique which would reveal them. Somehow American authors had to become aware of native materials for humorous literature; somehow they had to learn how to exploit them. (p. 16)

That the tall tale was a popular mode of expression is attested to by its wide use, for it appeared not only in oral literature but also in the works of established writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne,9 Herman Melville,10 Bret Harte11 and Jack London.12 Even the sophisticated Henry James includes, in his portrait of an American, "anecdotes of western life"13 and a "relish for ungrammatical conversation." (The American, p. 64)

At one point in The American, the protagonist defends the United States in true tall-tale fashion:

he finally broke out and swore that they were the greatest country in the world, that they could put all Europe in their breeches' pockets, and that an American who spoke ill of them ought to be carried home in irons and compelled to live in Boston. (p. 41)

It was Mark Twain, however, who best exploited native materials for humorous literature. Not only is his "Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" among the best-known of American tall tales but he also uses the tall-tale ingredients separately in various works. There is the pure satire of "Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation" and exaggeration like that in "Old Times on
the Mississippi": "I could have hung my hat on my eyes, they stuck out so far." And a great percentage of his works, the novels in particular, are written in dialect.

Kenneth S. Lynn, in his study of Southwestern humour, follows the example of Rourke in viewing humour in terms of character types. His first differentiation is between the Gentleman and the Clown and he explains that "the humorists of the Southwestern tradition represented themselves as Self-controlled Gentlemen who were outside and above the backwoods world [of the Clown] they described." (p. 155) Although Lynn goes on to show that out of "the crowd of literary Clowns...three basic types emerged"—the Confidence Man, the Soldier, and the Mighty Hunter (pp. 77, 86, 88)—he refers to the more general Clown figure specifically in his consideration of Mark Twain. For Twain not only fused "the Gentleman and the Clown of the Southwestern tradition into a single character," (p. 148) but he "established the once-despised voice of the Clowns as the narrative style of an entire novel." (p. 219) It is the backwoodsman, then, in the form of a ragged boy, whose voice becomes the narrative style of an entire novel, for the novel referred to is The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. And it was in his writing of this novel that Twain utilized all his native materials to reflect what was uniquely American in humour. For Huckleberry Finn not only contains all the elements found in the tall tale but it brings together, in one work, the three main national figures.

As types, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Jim are not so simple as the original Yankee, backwoodsman and Negro because,
due to Twain's treatment, each has evolved into a more complex being. Although Tom and Huck symbolize the difference between the urban and the rural, the opposition is slight and more emphasis is placed on their difference in education and on their relationship to society. Tom, as the Yankee, is accepted by society. He is a formalist who depends on book learning for his reasoning. Huck, as the backwoodsman, is an outcast who depends on his native wit and instinctive thinking. Huck's familiarity with witchcraft and folk magic indicates that some of the primitivism of the frontiersman has been retained. Jim, as Negro and slave, also shares in the primitive mind and has a detailed knowledge of nature. He has, however, surpassed the Negro of either the minstrelsy or of the Southern plantation for he, "with all his limitations, could pierce with his thought...to the very core of the problem."\(^\text{16}\) Through the three books in which they appear (The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Tom Sawyer Abroad) Tom, Huck and Jim can be recognized as representatives of three main strains in American identity which have endured to the present.

Although Twain presents the Yankee, the backwoodsman, and the Negro as real people, nothing of their symbolic quality is lost. "[T]he romantic escape from the commonplace into the faraway and long ago by which Tom Sawyer makes life in his humdrum hamlet a series of adventurous surprises" (Hoffman, p. 325) is the kind of escape used by people too pedestrian to break openly with the conventions of their society. Twain shows this same element in the larger unit of the Grangerford family, who "insofar as they
act out in the realm of moral choices the romantic notions of Tom Sawyer's daydreams...indict themselves and their culture for their lack of forgiveness, their failure to love." (Hoffman, p. 328) Lynn sees "the semi-rebellion of Tom Sawyer [in Tom Sawyer]...as the means of initiating him into the tribe and...the adult universe." (p. 196) Tom, then, is the man who accepts society as it is, becomes a part of it and then lives a conventional life.

Huck, on the other hand, is the individual who lives according to his own convictions and instincts. If he is classed as an outsider by society, it is because he has chosen that position for himself; it has not been imposed. Both Hoffman and Lynn indicate the relation between the two elements: "Tom, and Tom's family, are the world of convention, respectability, and status from which Huck had fled in the beginning....[A]mong these genteel people of good intentions but artificial impulses, there is only one defence. And that is to flee again"; (Hoffman, p. 348) and "[s]uch is the firmness of Tom's commitment to St. Petersburg that when...Huck Finn would grow dissatisfied with respectability he would not even ask his old friend to run away with him." (Lynn, p. 196)

Huck is initiated into the full meaning of life during his trip down-river with Jim on the raft. His acceptance of reality and his respect for it give him a "secret wisdom" and a freedom which Tom will never be able to share. (Hoffman, p. 330) Huck is unwilling to compromise his freedom in order to conform to convention. As Twain presents the situation in Huckleberry Finn, "the reality which Huck respects" is the dignity of the Negro.
(Hoffman, p. 349) As Hoffman observes, "One of the grand ironies of this book is that while it seems to show Huck protecting Jim, Jim is also taking care of Huck all along." (p. 333) This view, as applied to past Negro-white relationships, is one which has been stressed in recent essays and talks about the American Negro.17 But Jim represents more than the Negro. He is the element of American society which is kept in slavery, in one form or another, by forces beyond his control. He is the underdog. If the individualist (Huck) tries to protect him, he is in reality being taken care of in turn, for it is the underdog who, as victim of the insensitivity of conventional man (Tom),18 allows Huck to be viewed generously as a "romantic outcast."

(Hoffman, p. 330)

Since Tom, Huck and Jim are humorous characters, whether taken individually or in relationship to each other, there is no doubt that Mark Twain was able to exploit his materials successfully. But, after his treatment of the Yankee, backwoodsman and Negro, the three emerged not so much as characters, but as elements of a complex society. And since the time of Twain, the emphasis has not been on the type so much as on the more complex elements. Each element, as it emanates from Twain, has provided material for literature both serious and humorous.

As has been shown, the traits of the three figures were beginning to merge before Twain began writing. Thus shrewdness and pragmatism were attributed to both the Yankee and the backwoodsman; the backwoodsman and the Negro both possessed primitivistic qualities and were well-versed in magic and the ways of
nature; the Negro and the Yankee shared a cultural atmosphere from which the backwoodsman had withdrawn. The main opposition, however, was between the Yankee and the backwoodsman. After Twain, many of the old oppositions—of East and West, culture and roughness, education and ignorance, city and country—persisted, but there were new ones added. The Toms were conventional and cautious where the Hucks were individualistic and wilful. The Toms hid misdeeds behind pretentiousness; the Hucks were openly honest about everything, even their dishonesty. The Tom figure was the common man, the Huck figure was the non-conformist. The difference in their attitude to the underdog underlines their general opposition. The Jims were treated as human beings and friends by the Hucks, and as objects for ridicule and contempt by the Toms.

In his discussion of humorists in the twentieth century, Norris Yates continues in the tradition of Rourke (and Lynn), stating in his introduction: "The closest thing to a 'key' that can be found to the printed humor of this period is the humorists' use of character types." He deals with three types, the rustic sage, the respectable citizen, and the Little Man. These three can be readily recognized as versions of the Tom figure for each represents a type who is making his way through life within the confines of convention and the emphasis, in each case, is on the urban for even the sage, or cracker-barrel philosopher, has moved into town. The evolvement in the imaginary common man as summarized by Yates, is comparable to the evolvement of the Yankee into the Tom figure:
Economically this common man of the myth has become less independent; socially he has lost ground, and psychologically he feels less secure. In the late nineteenth century he was either a blend of Poor Richard and Honest Abe or such a plain but well-to-do businessman as Henry James' Christopher Newman; in either case he tended to be self-made, self-employed, and self-reliant; he lived in, or at least came from, a rural area, and, for better or worse, he was an active citizen and voter. By the middle of the twentieth century he had become a salaried, white-collar hack who still owned his own home but not his business, who lived in the city or commuted from a suburb, and whose relationship to the community and the State was mainly the passive one of consumer, both of goods and of propaganda. Moreover, he experienced much confusion of values and at times even doubted his own identity. As a citizen he had shrunk; as a personality he was threatened with disintegration. (p. 38f.)

There is a long list of works which use the common man as material for humour. Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* is probably the best known of the earlier works although John Kendrick Bangs, at the turn of the century, "wrote much of his work from the standpoint of the fairly well-to-do suburban householder....[and with] earlier humorists of suburbia, including Frederick Swartwout Cozzens....[and] Hayden Caruth,...anticipated the humor about suburbia by Irvin S. Cobb, Robert Benchley, James Thurber, and E. B. White, among others." (Yates, p. 53f.) 'Among others' could include H. L. Mencken and Ring Lardner, who both treated common man satirically, and Don Marquis who used a small-town character to satirize "those aspects of the small-town environment that had extended their influence into the city." (Yates, p. 197) Comic-strip characters such as Dagwood Bumstead, Henry Tremblechin and Mr. Milquetoast are within the same tradition.

Perhaps because the Huck figure, the non-conformist or individualist, was subject matter for more serious fiction, no definite humorous trend of literature developed directly out of
it. The type has figured largely in 'Western' stories where the cowboy is hero. According to J. Frank Dobie, the "cowboy became the best-known occupational type that America has given the world." But, although the "trail drivers of open range days... felt the urge to record experiences more strongly than their successors," (Dobie, p. 90) the literature of the range will not mature until it can "include keener searchings for meanings and harder struggles for human truths." (Dobie, p. 92) The 'Western' has not provided the proper material for humorous literature but has rather been monopolized by the movies or has gone into sub-literature. The traditions in the 'Western' which could have been used by literary humorists—the relationship between the cowboy and his horse, the role of the prostitute in the West, the opposition between the cowboy and the dude—were quickly exploited by the movie-makers themselves. In fact, Blair's chapter on Pecos Bill, alone, is proof that range life was barely in existence before it was seen as ripe for parody. Therefore, in order to trace the Huck trend in literature, it is necessary to examine other avenues.

W. M. Frohock speaks of a special kind of humour in America. It is a humour

native to our earth and deeprooted in history. Its material is the man who has been left behind in the rush to develop our frontiers, the man who stayed in one place, out of and away from the main current of our developing civilization, so largely untouched by what we think of as progress that his folkways and mores seem to us, at their best, quaint and a little exotic—and, at their worst, degenerate.

Here is the source for the humour of some of the writing of
Erskine Caldwell,²³ Eudora Welty,²⁴ William Faulkner,²⁵ and Tennessee Williams.²⁶ The characters are rural and simple. They are humorous because they are outside the norms of accepted society. They are not underdogs because they are not necessarily oppressed. They are people whose ways are incongruous to those of society and are therefore seen as exotic. Also, they appear remote in time as well as in place. They are idealized as primitives and are therefore spared consideration as outcasts. One of the clearest examples of the idealization is the case of the hillbilly of the Hatfield-McCoy tradition. Add to this type of material all ways of life, especially rural, which seem peculiar, or at least out of the ordinary to the common man, and the field of the Huck trend is outlined.

Writing pertaining to the underdog has been limited mostly to tracts and other social documentation. Involvement with his subject usually restricts the author's artistic ability and the work tends to didacticism, prescription, or sentimentality. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suffered from this restriction as did Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Also, the writer seldom gains the detachment necessary for a humorous treatment.

This, then, is the American tradition of humour. The figures of the Yankee, the backwoodsman and the Negro dominated the scene until the time of Mark Twain. Twain used the traits of the three for his more complex Tom, Huck and Jim figures, and these evolved, after Twain, into the common man, usually urban, the non-conformist, usually rural, and the underdog, usually treated seriously.
The area of the underdog is one John Steinbeck has chosen in which to exploit his native materials for humorous literature. Where Caldwell, Williams and others wrote of non-conforming people who were looked upon good-naturedly by the rest of society, Steinbeck's concern is for the group, or the individual, despised, even abused by society. His concern has been such that he has earned for himself a reputation of champion of the underdog. He has not gained this reputation, however, solely because of his humorous works. Of the novels concerned with the underdog, two are extremely serious.

Steinbeck has used the underdog as subject matter in several novels. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat are "clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business" and live in the part of Monterey where "the streets are innocent of asphalt and the corners free of street lights," and they are scorned by both English and Spanish for they speak the language of both with a paisano accent. (TF, p. 3) In In Dubious Battle, Steinbeck "tried to make a meaningful pattern out of the behaviour of exploited men who were not able to speak for themselves." In The Grapes of Wrath the characters are patterned after the migrant workers in California whom he saw as "badgered, tormented and hurt...tormented and starved." Mack and the boys of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday are thought of by the rest of Monterey as "no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums." (CR, p. 278) Of these novels, Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday are highly amusing, The Grapes of Wrath contains some humour, and In Dubious Battle is completely serious.
But Steinbeck does not restrict his humorous writings to the field of the underdog alone. Doc, in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, exhibits the qualities of the Huck figure. The Wayward Bus and The Winter of Our Discontent use the common man to satirize modern urban society. It is in the area of the underdog, however, that Steinbeck's humour is most successful and this is due, in part, to his ability to elevate his characters, through humour, to the level of the Huck figure. Thus, in order to assess his treatment of the underdog, it is necessary first to examine his concept of the Huck figure, who is his ideal man.

French sees the Steinbeck hero as "the man who is able to do his job exceedingly well," with "emphasis placed upon skill and craftsmanship." (p. 78) He observes that "affection, skill and respect have been the trait of all the really heroic men in his novels—Doctor Burton in In Dubious Battle, Slim in Of Mice and Men, Tom Joad in The Grapes of Wrath, Mayor Orden in The Moon is Down, Doc in Cannery Row, and Juan Chicoy in The Wayward Bus." (p. 149) To this list may be added Billy Buck of The Red Pony, Lee of East of Eden and even Joe Saul of Burning Bright. But French goes even further and places Doc of Cannery Row as the specific Steinbeck hero:

Doc is the man who survives, the heroic figure. Doc is not perfect; he is not infallible....Doc is a man who has learned that love brings suffering, but he is one who has learned to find compensation for the frailties of human nature and other aspects of physical nature. (p. 135)

In his non-fiction, too, Steinbeck's presentations of figures disclose what he views as ideal. The most important figure is his close friend, Ed Ricketts, who collaborated with him on
Sea of Cortez (1941). French links Ricketts to Steinbeck's fictional work:

The admirable character is Doc; and it is entirely clear from the essay "About Ed Ricketts" [in LSC]...that Doc in Cannery Row is a picture of Ricketts, to whom Steinbeck dedicated the book. The influence of Ricketts on Steinbeck's whole life and work is incalculable, but certainly Cannery Row makes it clear that Steinbeck regarded Ricketts as the most nearly ideal figure he had met—the heroic symbol of human potentialities wisely utilized. (p. 136)

The Ricketts-Doc figure, then, (obvious, also, in the portrayal of Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle and Dr. Phillips in "The Snake") represents Steinbeck's ideal man.

Before discussing how the author creates humour by using this figure as his reference point, consideration of another figure which elicits Steinbeck's admiration serves to add to an understanding of his concept of ideal man:

Around the corner from where I live a barrow man has his post. He cleans the street and picks up papers in the park. He lives a comfortable and successful life. At night he sleeps under the barrow and when it rains he drapes a waterproof cover over the handles to make a shelter. His friends visit him under his barrow and sometimes they play cards. The postman delivers mail to the barrow. The barrow man has always a bottle of wine uncorked in his shoulder bag and a piece of bread and cheese for his friends. His eye is merry and his nose is not pale. In the great world he would be considered a failure and something of a rascal, for the world of property considers it a sin to be content without things....My man has apparently given up things he can do without for others that are more important. I admire him. 31

The barrow man is not oppressed yet Steinbeck's reasons for admiring him closely resemble the reasons attributed to him by Beach for admiring the underdog—"because of his many virtues. And then, because in him the primary human impulses are less overlaid with disguise, and stand out in stark simplicity." (p. 87)

The Huck figure and the Jim figure, then, share traits which
Steinbeck admires. They are non-materialistic and unpretentious as opposed to the grasping, hypocritical Tom figures who are targets for many of his satirical attacks. But Steinbeck's Huck figure is ideal because he is skilful in his own job, self-sufficient but not materialistic, never loses sight of the importance of the rest of humanity, and, although rarely a humorous figure, possesses an awareness which allows a humorous outlook.

Just as Doc functions as a reference point in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, allowing Mack and the boys to be presented humorously in their contrast to him, so the Huck figure functions throughout Steinbeck's works as a constant reminder of the ideal. With the ideal in mind, characters and actions generate humour in an amount directly related to their deviation from it. And by using the Huck figure as a standard, Steinbeck is able to achieve humour in a number of ways. His Huck figure can, himself, be amusing in his own personality. By determining his own position between the other two figures, that is, by remaining above the Jim level and by rejecting the Tom position, it is possible for the Huck figure to comprehend fully the incongruities present in both, and therefore he is able himself to produce humour intentionally. It is this very awareness, for example, which moves Tom Joad out of the position of the underdog to that of the Huck figure. In his rough joking with the one-eyed mechanic he reveals his understanding of both the oppressed man and his harsh employer. (GW, p. 245) Another source of humour for the Huck figure is the exhibition by him of the less ideal attributes
of the Jim figure, such as Doc's shiftless manner of housekeeping.

The Jim figure is humorous when he is elevated to the level of the Huck figure, for, after all, Danny and his *paisanos*, Mack and his boys are presented as skilful in their profession (which is to stay idle), self-sufficient (they steal what they need) and non-materialistic (they lack possessions). The Jim figure also serves to create humour when he aspires to the level of the Tom figure, as when a *paisano* woman pushes a vacuum cleaner although she has no electricity (*TF*, p. 51) or when one of Mack's boys is worry-ridden about becoming president of the United States. (*ST*, p. 140) The Tom figure, alone, generates humour, usually satire, as is the case with Ethan Hawley in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. And when he attempts to assume the Huck role, like the business man who condescends to ride on a bus in order to "see the country better that way" and to "see what the people, the real people, [are] talking about," (*WB*, p. 247) he is invariably funny.

Steinbeck's success with humour, then, depends not so much on the variety of his comic figures as on the variety of ways in which he manipulates the levels of the three main characters in American humorous fiction—the common man, the non-conformist, and the underdog. Not only has he "become aware of native materials for humorous literature" and learned "how to exploit them,"32 but he has handled them meaningfully within the American tradition. Steinbeck's humour, like his writing generally, has an "indelible American stamp." (*Moore*, p. 87)
Chapter Three

Definitions

Before an author's humour can be discussed satisfactorily, it is necessary to examine humour in general terms and to define its many aspects. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the terms used in the analysis of Steinbeck's humour. This is done by defining the qualities present in humour, by isolating it from related modes, by defining the general areas within which a writer's ability to create humour may be assessed, and by defining the literary forms which depend chiefly on humour and the various techniques through which humour can be created.

Among those who study humour as a phenomenon there is general agreement that the basis of humour is incongruity. James Sully speaks of the German philosophers, especially of Kant, and their "Intellectual Theory, or Theory of Contrariety, or Incongruity."¹ He refers more definitely to Schopenhauer's theory of incongruity, where in "every instance...the phenomenon of laughter indicates the sudden perception of an incongruity between a conception...and a real object, which is to be understood or 'thought' through...this conception."² (p. 130) Charles Darwin, considering laughter which results from a ludicrous idea, explains the cause as "something unexpected--a novel or incongruous idea which breaks through an habitual train of thought";² and for William Hazlitt, "the essence of the laughable...is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, as the jostling of one feeling against another."³ Stephen Leacock uses the term freely in both
his analyses of humour, stating that "humour finds its basis in the incongruity of life itself." Even the complicated machine theory of Henri Bergson can be reduced to a simple theory of incongruity, for "[s]omething mechanical encrusted on the living" can be seen as merely that which is incongruous to the natural process of life. It is generally agreed, then, that incongruity is an essential quality of humour.

Although humour is always based on incongruity, incongruity is not always humorous. For example, guillotining is not humorous though it is incongruous to nature that a man's head be severed from his body. Therefore it is obvious that some further quality is necessary in order to render the incongruity humorous. This quality is dealt with by Sigmund Freud in his discussion of the emotional state of the individual when humour arises: "the pleasure...of humor [originates] from an economy of expenditure of feeling." This is a point which is dealt with at more length by Bergson, who speaks of laughter as being accompanied by "absence of feeling" and further, that "[i]ndifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion." (p. 63) Since his explanation of humour involves mechanization of life, it follows that he should see a certain unnaturalness or mechanization of emotions in the individual engaged in humour and that two of his essential conditions for laughter should be "[u]nsociability in the performer and insensibility in the spectator." (p. 154f.) Max Eastman stipulates that the "feelings aroused in the person who is expected to laugh must not be too strong and deep." The opinion that humour is divorced from
emotion is included in almost any writing on the subject of humour, whether it appear in definite terms such as Edmund Bergler's "laughter is an antidote to inner emotions,"8 or Suzanne Langer's oblique concern with how comedy uses unrealistic effects "to clear the way for its humor."9

Humour, therefore, is based on incongruity and arises when the audience is kept from emotional involvement. Even guillotining can be amusing if presented in a manner which distances the audience sufficiently from the horror. Charles Baudelaire tells of a pantomime in which an inveterate thief, whose appearance and actions were presented in a highly exaggerated way, was condemned to the guillotine:

After struggling and bellowing like an ox that scents the slaughter-house, at last Pierrot bowed to his fate. His head was severed from his neck—a great red and white head, which rolled noisily to rest in front of the prompter's box, showing the bleeding disk of the neck, the split vertebrae and all the details of a piece of butcher's meat just dressed for the counter. And then all of a sudden, the decapitated trunk, moved by its irresistible obsession with theft, jumped to its feet, triumphantly 'lifted' its own head as though it was [sic] a ham or a bottle of wine, and...proceeded to stuff it into its pocket!10

Here pantomime and hyperbole have provided the necessary distance. Incongruity, then, is always humorous unless the audience is too emotionally involved with the victim to gain sufficient detachment to be aware of the incongruity. Yet the most horrifying incongruity can be made humorous through adequate distancing. It is the function of the humorist to create this distance.

Along with the necessary qualities of incongruity and detachment, there is always implicit in humour the resultant quality of correction. The examination of any joke or humorous
piece reveals that something or someone is usually the butt of the laughter. For merely to laugh at someone implies that the person's behaviour is contrary to the expected, that the incongruity between his behaviour and the norm is the cause for mirth. Contained in humour, therefore, is the implication of a correction. Even when humour, operating in a high literary sense, fulfills an aesthetic function, the attempt to correct is still inherent in the work. For example, when the reader laughs at the actions and attitudes of the paisanos in *Tortilla Flat*, he is unconsciously implying that they do not live according to the acceptable standards of American society. Perhaps Bergson is most successful in describing the corrective function of humour: "Laughter...does not belong to the province of esthetics alone, since unconsciously...it pursues an utilitarian aim of general improvement." (p. 73) Pursuing the utilitarian aspect of art, Bergson continues:

> just because laughter aims at correcting, it is expedient that the correction should reach as great a number of persons as possible. This is the reason comic observation instinctively proceeds to what is general. It chooses...peculiarities that are held in common....[It] creates works which doubtless belong to art in that their only visible aim is to please, but which will be found to contrast with other works of art by reason of their generality, and also of their scarcely confessed or scarcely conscious intention to correct and instruct. (p. 170)

Basic to the implicit corrective function of humour is the theory that humour stems from feelings of aggression. Freud refers to the relation between aggression and humour when he states that "transferring into a comic situation...is a good aid in aggression, in the service of which production of the
comic is wont to place itself." (CTP, p. 73) Edmund Bergler states that all forms of humour are "directed at one specific inner danger: the accusation by inner conscience that one is a lover of the pleasure-in-displeasure pattern--psychic masochism. The...ego's answer is specious aggression." (p. x) Bergler's thesis is that humour replaces the feeling of aggression as the weapon used against the unconscious self-accusation of masochism--the substitution by pseudo-aggression for aggressive impulses. The theory that humour replaces aggressive impulses can be applied outside of the individual psyche to the individual's relations to his environment. The feeling of anger can be expressed through open aggression or through humour. For example, when Steinbeck became incensed at the intrusion into his privacy caused by a library questionnaire, he did not answer with invective but wrote:

Name: John Ernst Alcibrades Socrates Steinbeck.
Born: Lesbos, Magna Graeca, 1902.
Father: Herodotus Xenophon Steinbeck.
Mother: Chloe Mathilde Lopez....
Writings: The Unstrung Harpie. Donohoe, 1906....
        Barnacles (Ballinadai). Monograph. 2 vols....
        Bugs, a Critical Study. Morbide Press.11

This curriculum vitae must have been more gratifying to Steinbeck himself than had he answered the questionnaire harshly, and it doubtless impressed the library officials more than a more direct objection would have done. The fact that aggression is the source, and correction is the aim, of humour is most clearly revealed in militant humour such as satire, in which the writer attempts to correct institutions of manners which have angered him by rendering them laughable through ridicule.

One of the difficulties in discussing an author's humorous
writing is that there is a general vagueness surrounding the meanings of terms related to humour. Some definers are reluctant to commit themselves to definite statements about the various aspects of humour, giving tendencies of related modes rather than definitions. Some deal with the term 'humour' in a restricted sense, separating it from such terms as 'wit,' 'satire,' and 'irony.' Such a restricted use stems from the eighteenth century meaning of the word, when it was used to distinguish between two modes of amusing writing—wit and humour. Humour consisted of the tolerant, sympathetic awareness of human nature as opposed to wit, which consisted of the intellectual, intolerant appraisal of humanity. However, through usage, the term 'humour' has come to include anything that provokes amused laughter. In this way it includes the eighteenth century meanings of both humour and wit, and it is with this inclusive meaning that the term is here applied to Steinbeck's works. The generally indiscriminate usage has added to the confusion of meanings in an area where there has always been much overlapping of terms. Because there is disagreement about meanings even among established definers, the definitions in this chapter are a synthesis of definitions given in a number of works. The main works consulted are: Shipley; Thrall and Hibbard; Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism; and Leacock, Humour and Humanity. There has been much confusion between the meanings of comedy and humour. Comedy is broadly applied to works in which characters experience frustration or discomfiture which does not involve the emotions of the audience. In the climax the
protagonist becomes incorporated into his society after having gradually overcome all obstacles. This definition is similar to that of humour in that there is an absence of emotion. However, it differs in that humour does not necessarily deal with characters, and also it does not depend on the outcome of the action, which is of less importance than the laugh-provoking quality. The dependence of comedy on outcome implies considerable duration, whereas with humour the action can be of extremely short duration. The emphasis of comedy, then, is on plot, while the emphasis of humour is on mood. Humour may be, and often is, found in modes other than comedy. For example, a piece of serious writing may have a short humorous episode within it. Such is the case in Steinbeck's article on the shelling of Dover by the Germans, in which, in the middle of describing the horror of the destruction, he tells of an old man whose rose bush has been damaged. The man "looks at the French coast, where five hundred men and a great tube of steel and high explosive and charts and plans, mathematical formulae, uniforms, telephones, shouted orders, are out to break a man's rose bush." (OW, p. 48f.) Furthermore, comedy need not always depend on the sense of humour, that is, the ability to discern the incongruous. For example, melodrama can be called comedy without humour in that the action always turns out well for the protagonists although their situations are not intended to be amusing. (Frye, p. 40) The two terms overlap only in the area in which comedy is amusing. The study here is not of the comedy in Steinbeck's works, but of the humour, which, although in this case it includes all of the comedy, goes
beyond it to include all passages that reveal incongruity and are presented with detachment.

The term 'comic' should be defined here also. When used as the 'comic mode' it refers to comedy, but the word 'comic' itself has become synonymous with 'humorous.' The term 'comic relief' refers to the specific use of humour in order to achieve a certain effect. It may, as the term suggests, relieve the tension of serious writing. In such cases it consists usually of short passages which are irrelevant to the main plot. However, it may also intensify pathos or tragedy through contrast. This usually results when the humorous passages are an integral part of the plot. Each time the serious tone is resumed after a humorous interlude, the surge of emotional tension is increased by the contrast. It is the latter use of comic relief on which Steinbeck depends in his fiction.

In attempting to assess a writer's ability to create humour, it is advisable to consider his humour, initially, in general terms. Humour falls naturally into four large areas: language, idea, situation, and character. The quality and degree of humour depend largely on an author's skill in developing the humour in any one of these areas, and on his ability to combine the different areas.

Humour of language arises when there is incongruity in the use of words. It includes puns, which evoke humour by the incongruous meanings of phonetically similar words; the intentional use of misspelling, of bad grammar, and of dialect; and the sudden use of an incorrect word, or the sudden use of a correct
word when it is not expected. Steinbeck seldom uses puns, but in his description of Charley's fitful sleep on the night after having encountered a number of bears, he writes: "his feet were making running gestures and his body jerked and his eyes were wide open, but it was only a night bear." (TC, p. 165) It is intentional misspelling when Mrs. Mallory says, "'you begrutch me $1.98.'" (CR, p. 293) Much of the humour of Tortilla Flat stems from the stylized dialect of the paisanos. Misuse and misunderstanding of a word, and also bad grammar, are seen in the dialogue:

"Just because he doesn't run no dame naked through the streets...you think Doc's celebrate."...
"That's when you can't get no dame."...
"I thought it was a kind of party." (CR, p. 291)

And when Mack speaks of "'I and the boys,'" (CR, p. 295) instead of the expected 'Me and the boys,' he is attempting to be correct where the reader does not expect correctness.

Humour of idea results from the close association of incongruous conceptions. An example of this is seen in the episode in which the prostitutes at Dora's Bear Flag Restaurant, in order to attend Doc's party, change from "the long beautiful dresses which were their uniforms" to street dresses. (CR, p. 349)

Here it is the incongruity between the idea that girls usually 'dress up' to go to a party, and the idea that Dora's girls, because of their profession, must 'dress down' in order to be appropriately dressed for the occasion. Humour of idea is also found in the tall tale, where the incongruity lies not so much between the expected and the presented (the surprise is lost
after the first exaggeration), as between the conception the
teller has of himself and the conception his listener has of him.

Humour of situation results when an act is incongruous to its surroundings. It is humorous that Mrs. Mallory wants curtains when her home is a boiler which has no windows. (CR, p. 293) Not only is her yearning for curtains incongruous to the surroundings which allow no place for her to hang them, but also her bourgeois pretentiousness is incongruous to the extremely humble condition of her home.

Humour of character arises from the incongruity between a person's physiology or psychology and the norm. A character can be humorous if something is unnatural in his appearance or clothing, or if his mentality is incongruous to his position in life. Thus, Dora is described as "a great big woman with flaming orange hair and a taste for Nile green evening dresses," (CR, p. 279) and Hazel, who is unable to count his own toes correctly, enrolled through the G.I. bill "at the University of California for training in astrophysics by making a check mark on an application." (ST, p. 4) Both Mack and Pilon are humorous because of their mentality also, but are opposite to Hazel in that they are mentally far more competent than is expected from their position in society.

Of these four areas, none produces better humour than the others. However, a combination of two or more of them increases the intensity of humour. For example, the episode in which Pilon opens a few small holes in the fence between Danny's yard and Mrs. Morales' chicken yard (TF, p. 9) is intensely humorous
because Steinbeck combines in it the four areas. The speech of Pilon is the overly correct pseudo-dialect which Steinbeck gives the *paisanos*; there is incongruity between the presented concept of Pilon's kindliness toward the hens (in considering that the weeds would make good nests and in making traps to snare the roosters which might bother them) and the implication that he expects to get eggs and roosters for the table; the situation is humorous in that theft is made not only to appear accidental, but also to be an act of kindness; and the humour of Pilon's character emerges through the description of the mastermind who can lay such elaborate plans for such a nefarious occupation.

Much of Steinbeck's humour shows elements of literary forms that depend mainly on humour. These include tragicomedy, picaresque, tall tale, and *fabliau*. In traditional tragicomedy the plot, theme and subject matter appear to lead toward a tragic conclusion, but an unexpected comic reversal brings about a favourable outcome for the protagonists. In modern usage, however, any work is called tragicomedy when serious and humorous episodes combine, regardless of the outcome. Both *Tortilla Flat* and *Of Mice and Men* can be considered as tragicomedies.

The picaresque is a chronicle of a rogue who lives by his wits and who, as a social parasite, satirizes the society he exploits. It is episodic in structure, and is usually realistically presented. *Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row,* and *Sweet Thursday* show elements of the picaresque in the 'group-rogue' aspect of the *paisanos* and the boys from the Palace Flophouse, in the social satire these group-rogues convey, and, except for *Sweet*
Thursday, in their episodic structures.

Tall tales are a part of folklore (the legends and tales traditional to a culture) in which both character and incident are grossly exaggerated by a narrator. The humour here arises mostly out of the incongruity between the accepted idea of a story-teller and the audacity of the lies told by the teller of tall tales. There are elements of tall tale in *Sweet Thursday* when Mack and Doc reminisce about the past. This is especially true when they speak of Lee Chong. "They volleyed Lee Chong back and forth, and their memories built virtues that would have surprised him, and cleverness and beauty too. While one told a fine tale of that mercantile Chinaman the other waited impatiently to top the story....In such a way are the gods created." (p. 5)

A form of comic short tale which flourished in medieval times and is little seen in modern writings is the *fabliau*. It was usually in verse and presented lower-class characters in themes which were bawdy satires ridiculing such things as the clergy and womanhood. "St. Katy the Virgin," in its bawdiness and in its heavy satire of the church and virginity, shows a strong resemblance to the *fabliau*.

The techniques through which a writer may create humour can be grouped into two general categories: that which is harmless and that which is used as a weapon. In his investigation of humour, Freud makes a distinction between "tendency wit," which stems from the unconscious impulses of aggression, and "harmless wit," which merely releases the impulse of play.19 It is possible to extend Freud's definitions to humour in general; thus "tendency
"wit" becomes a part of 'tendency' or 'militant' humour, which is used as a weapon, and "harmless wit" becomes a part of 'harmless' or 'innocuous' humour, which merely entertains. In militant humour the laughter becomes derisive and is directed at a specific object which becomes the butt of the humour. In general, militant humour tends to be more entertaining than innocuous humour because it not only gives a definite purpose to the humour, but it also appeals to the latent pseudo-aggressive tendencies of an audience. Steinbeck's techniques of humour which are innocuous include repetition, reversal, hyperbole, meiosis, self-deprecation, anticlimax, the grotesque, farce, slapstick, folk humour, crude humour, wit, and irony. His techniques of humour which are militant are satire and sarcasm, which are related to irony, and burlesque, which includes mock epic and parody. When wit and slapstick are militant they become, in effect, satire.

Repetition is one of the most common means of creating humour. It always leads finally to laughter because it is incongruous to the natural process of the life of an individual from birth to death. (Bergson, p. 118) The repeated hoodwinking of Torrelli by the paisanos intensifies the humour of situation in Tortilla Flat. Reversal generates humour by presenting the opposite to that which is expected. Steinbeck uses reversal in the simile which describes Charley's reaction to "mountains of manure." "Charley moved about smiling and sniffing ecstatically like an American woman in a French perfume shop." (TC, p. 127) The reversal, of course, lies in the fact that Charley is a French poodle sniffing American manure. Reversal also results when a
series of repetitions is interrupted by an unexpected change, as when Steinbeck repeatedly emphasizes Charley's love for trees, then tells how he scorned a giant redwood for a hazlenut bush. (TC, p. 189)

Hyperbole can be humorous or serious, but the modern tendency is to view it in a humorous light. When used by itself, however, the humour is usually of a low quality. Thus tall tales are not very funny in their content alone. The exaggeration must be combined with the audacity of the narrator before the tale becomes hilarious. Steinbeck uses exaggeration by itself, with poor effect, in describing his hunting jacket, which had "a game pocket in the rear big enough to smuggle an Indian princess into a Y.M.C.A." (TC, p. 39) He is more successful with the description of the half-wit's trial in *East of Eden*, when the judge says, "'He would have admitted climbing the golden stairs and cutting St. Peter's throat with a bowling ball.'" (p. 89) Here the exaggeration is more humorous because it is combined with other techniques. There is suggestion of folk humour in the statement itself, and of reversal in that a judge would make it. There is also satire in the situation in which local authorities prosecute an innocent person in order to appease the public.

The opposite to hyperbole is meiosis, or understatement, a form of irony which deliberately minimizes, usually for humorous effect. An example of meiosis is seen in the characterization of Wide Ida, who sprained her shoulder when she threw out a drunk. (ST, p. 38) Self-deprecation is similar to meiosis in that it deliberately minimizes. It is motivated by the need to defend
oneself from the ridicule of others. By deriding the self, one attempts to preclude attack from others. It is most often humorous because the incongruity between the expected egoism and the actual deprecation is seldom painful. An example of this is Hazel's insistence that he is not good enough to be president of the United States. (ST, p. 175)

Anticlimax, the sudden descent from the serious to the trivial, can be used intentionally to produce humour or satire. The passage from *Once There Was a War*, which describes the accumulation of men and materials which "are out to break a man's rose bush," is anticlimactic, as is the one from *Cannery Row*:
"Silent early morning dogs parade majestically picking and choosing judiciously whereon to pee." (p. 310) The grotesque involves the mixture of forms to produce extreme distortion. This mixture is often of human and animal shapes or traits, or a mixture of grim and humorous incidents. The grotesque usually provokes humour because of the extreme incongruity, but as a result of the frequent presence of grisly events, it often is a grim humour. There is the element of the grotesque in the incident of Cyrus Trask mourning his wife. Whenever the baby cried he gave it a rag soaked in whiskey. "The baby was drunk for two days and a half." (EE, p. 16)

A type of humour which depends on violent action for its effect, with no appeal to the intellect, is low comedy. Farce and slapstick are closely related forms of low comedy. In both, the normal standards of motivation are ignored in order to gain maximum humorous effect. Also, both present flat characters who
repeatedly stumble into ridiculous situations. They differ in that the emphasis in farce is on exaggerated characters and events, in slapstick on exaggerated physical violence. When the focus is primarily on character the farce is termed buffoonery. The farcical element in "St. Katy the Virgin" is evident in the passage concerning Katy's conception and motherhood:

The boar was sterile from that day on....But Katy swelled up and...had her litter. She cleaned them all up and licked them off the way you'd think motherhood had changed her ways. When she got them all dry and clean, she placed them in a row and ate every one of them. (LV, p. 191)

Slapstick relies entirely on physical violence to produce humour. Here the humour is generated through the incongruity between the exaggerated violence and the accustomed calmness of everyday living. Although slapstick can appear brutal, the audience is sufficiently detached by the knowledge that the victim always leaps up unscathed. Much of the effect of slapstick stems from the subconscious aggressive impulses of the audience, which identifies with the aggressor. The series of fights between Danny and Pilon, in which "Danny lost a tooth, and Pilon had his shirt torn off,...[and the]girls stood shrieking by and kicked whichever man happened to be down," is an example of slapstick, for the brutality of the fight becomes humorous when it is revealed that it is proper etiquette for a paisano host to entertain his guest with a good fight. (TF, p. 11f.) Although the violence of slapstick suggests a form of militant humour, it is usually without motivation and without specific purpose. When the violence is directed in a specific direction with intent to ridicule, it becomes militant, but is then a form of satire.
Folk humour consists of folklore which deals with the incongruities of human behaviour. The incongruous in folklore is nearly always humorous because of the remoteness effected by the countless retellings. Tom Joad's anecdote about Willie and the heifer is strongly suggestive of folk humour. (GW, p. 94) Crude humour may be seen as related to folk humour in that it is expressed in common language, arises out of everyday events, and forms part of the natural vocabulary of the unsophisticated. For instance, the most natural way for Hazel to describe the stink bugs is to say they have "their asses up in the air." (CR, p. 288)

Wit is a highly intellectual form of humour which consists of a clever association of idea and expression which is intended to produce surprise through its unexpectedness. Ethan Hawley is witty when he describes the meticulously punctual bank manager: "Then his balance wheel started and he ticked off to the bank." (WD, p. 255) Irony also demands a highly intellectual audience which can discern the incongruity between the attitude implied, which may be intentional or unintentional, and that which is expressed. Unlike wit, irony is often not humorous, for it depends less on detachment than on incongruity alone. When there is sufficient detachment, the irony is humorous. There is fine humorous irony, intended by Steinbeck, but not by his character, in the prostitute's comment about her wedding dress: "'Grandma left it to Mama, and Mama left it to me....We ain't none of us needed it.'" (ST, p. 117)

The forms of militant humour which Steinbeck uses are few compared to his many forms of innocuous humour. They include
only satire, sarcasm, and the two kinds of burlesque, mock epic and parody. Satire is a form of irony which differs in that it is always militant. It is the means of reducing a subject to the ridiculous so that it becomes the object of scorn, contempt or amusement. Its weapon is laughter which is directed against a butt outside of the work itself. Steinbeck satirizes a certain type of enthusiastic artist when he writes: "It is not known whether Henri was a good painter or not for he threw himself so violently into movements that he had very little time left for painting of any kind." (CR, p. 332)

Sarcasm is a form of irony which requires little intellect to discern, for the incongruity between implication and expression is very obvious. Its aim is to inflict pain through the caustic expression of dispraise given under the pretext of praise. It is an unrefined form of humour, and it is gratifying that Steinbeck uses it very rarely. One of the few instances in which he speaks sarcastically is when he observes of the Mexican children: "The poor little savages seem not to have learned the great principle of cheating one another." (SC, p. 112)

The term 'burlesque' is generally used to include all literary forms in which institutions, actions, persons or other literary works are ridiculed through incongruous imitation. It takes two forms: high burlesque, in which a trivial subject is treated in elevated terms, and low burlesque, in which a serious subject is treated in a ridiculous manner. All forms of burlesque are satiric in their tendency to ridicule a subject. Whatever Steinbeck has written imitatively has been high burlesque.
Mock epic is a form of high burlesque in which insignificant characters and trivial episodes are ridiculed by being treated in the elevated style of an epic. In *Tortilla Flat*, Steinbeck gently ridicules the *paisano* way of life by treating it in the epic style of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Another form of high burlesque is parody. It is always militant for, although it does not attack its subject, it derides the style of a specific author by imitating his work, replacing the original subject with trivial materials. In his early poem, "If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job: HAPPY BIRTHDAY!", Steinbeck ridicules Guest's sentimental style and forced rhyming by such lines as:

```
Neighbor Job was a man of Uz;
He stood for the best in Life.
He hated Sin, and he wore a grin
Whenever he beat his wife....
```

Although they have been defined, the various kinds of humour cannot always be isolated and categorized. There is almost always some overlapping and duplicating of techniques in any humorous episode. For example, satire is bounded on one extreme by wit, which is a highly intellectual form of humour, and on the other by invective, which is a completely humourless weapon used as pure denunciation. (Frye, p. 224) Hyperbole is seldom used alone, but is usually accompanied by repetition or a reversal in the form of an unexpected understatement. Thus, when a term is used, it applies most often to the aspect of humour which is emphasized in an episode or passage and rarely to the pure form of that aspect.
The terms discussed in this chapter are defined in accordance with their application to Steinbeck's humour. Certain terms relating to humour, such as travesty and lampoon, have not been mentioned because Steinbeck has never used them. Humour itself has been defined as anything which evokes amused laughter. It is based on incongruity and depends for its effect on sufficient detachment of the audience's emotions to filter out the painful and the horrifying. Also, always implicit in humour is the quality of correction, which is almost imperceptible in innocuous humour but highly evident in militant humour. The creation of humour is motivated by impulses of aggression which take the more rewarding and safer form of humour; that is, humour is a form of pseudo-aggression. Through the application of these aspects of humour to Steinbeck's works, and through the appraisal of his ability to combine the various areas of humour, as well as his use of literary forms and techniques of humour, a relationship can be established between his humour and the body of his writing, and some conclusions can be drawn about his attitudes toward writing, toward society and toward humanity.
Chapter Four
An Analysis of Steinbeck's Humour

The most satisfactory way in which to evaluate Steinbeck's humour is to consider a number of specimens of each type selected from different stages of his career. An attempt is made to indicate the frequency with which he makes use of each type and the degree of success he achieves with each, or, as in some cases, the varying degrees of success within each type. From such an analysis it is then possible to determine what elements of humour are most persistent in his writing.

It is not important to discuss separately the four general areas of humour in relation to Steinbeck's work, for any example of humour falls into either humour of language, of idea, of situation or of character. It is important, however, to look at the episodes in which he combines several, or all, of these areas, for such combination results in some of his best humour and shows the deliberate care with which he produces humour. In the episode in which Danny gives Sweets Ramirez the vacuum cleaner, (TF, pp. 50-54) seen by Beach as one of the most humorous in the novel, (SHC, p. 88) Steinbeck uses all four areas of humour. There is humour of language in the *paisanos'* dialect, as there is in all the episodes of *Tortilla Flat*. Humour of idea is in the fact that the possession which gives Sweets the highest social position in electricity-free Tortilla Flat is an electric vacuum cleaner. Humour of idea is compounded when it is learned that the vacuum cleaner has no motor. There is humour of situation
in that Danny wins his 'lady' with a useless symbol of materialism. Humour of character is apparent in both Sweets and Pilon. Sweets capitalizes on the useless gift to effect her social elevation by including "the sweeping-machine" constantly in her conversation. (p. 51) Pilon is his usual rational self when he advises Danny, "'If that lady did not have the sweeping-machine, she would not want those wires....Therefore,...the thing to do is to remove the sweeping-machine...and in return you can take the lady a present of a gallon of wine.'" (p. 53)

It is difficult for an author to combine the four areas without giving the appearance of having contrived the humour, yet Steinbeck combines the four areas successfully a number of times in the three humorous novels, *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*. In *Cannery Row* he makes use of the four areas in the episode of the frog hunt. (pp. 307-309, 311-315) There is humour of language in Mack's "'I and the Captain,'" (p. 309) and Hughie's "'I and him,'" (p. 307) not only because of attempted correctness but also because of the repeated use of this construction. There are many instances of humour of idea in the episode: through his purchase of the frogs Doc will, in effect, finance the party to be given for him; the Captain's wife is away because she is in politics, (p. 312) and when a fire starts in her curtains it is put out with the aid of her small towels; (p. 314) the Captain is willing to abandon his possessions in order to live with Mack and the boys in the Palace Flophouse. The entire situation is extremely humorous in that five men flounder through the frog pond at
night in haphazard organization aided by the owner of the pond, who afterwards aids them again in laying similar waste to his own home. The characters of both Mack and the captain add much to the humour of the episode: Mack in his professional solicitation of the captain, and the captain in his reversal from autocratic landowner to envious outsider. Following the frog hunt, Steinbeck again utilizes all four areas of humour in the episode involving the use of the frogs as currency at Lee Chong's grocery. (p. 324f.) Here humour of language is increased by Lee Chong's dialect, "'We got see flog.'" (p. 324) The very idea that frogs can be sound currency with a set value is amusing. The situation becomes humorous when Eddie buys "two frogs' worth of Bull Durham," and Jones is outraged when the price of Coca-Cola goes up "from one to two frogs." (p. 325) Mack again contributes to humour of character, which is intensified by Lee Chong's strong sense of mercantilism.

Although Sweet Thursday received little praise from critics, much of its humour is excellent. In a number of episodes Steinbeck uses three or four of the areas with highly successful results. In the episode in which Hazel confesses that he cannot become president of the United States (p. 175) there is humour of language in the incorrect grammar of Mack and Hazel; humour of idea in that the most dull-witted of the boys could aspire seriously to the presidency, and that he came to the conclusion by himself that the task was too great for him; humour of situation in that Hazel realizes the enormity of the job when he becomes mentally fatigued with working out Doc's emotional
problem; humour of character in Hazel's helplessness and in Mack's tender concern for him.

It is surprising that, after combining the four areas of humour so successfully in his first three humorous novels, Steinbeck does not attempt to combine them in his fourth humorous work, _The Short Reign of Pippin IV_. This lack of combination explains partly the novel's failure, although there are other, more important reasons which will be discussed later. It is even more surprising that Steinbeck's most successful combination of the four areas appears, not in any of his humorous novels, but in _Of Mice and Men_, which is generally valued for its seriousness of theme. Perhaps the most intensely humorous episode in all of his work is that in which Aunt Clara and the gigantic rabbit confront Lennie. (MM, p. 205f.) Here Steinbeck utilizes all four areas of humour and the incongruity in each is so great that the combined effect produces one of the funniest episodes in American literature. The incongruity in the language arises from the fact that not only do both Aunt Clara and the rabbit speak in Lennie's voice but also that their admonishments are those repeated often by George. What could be more incongruous than starched little Aunt Clara saying, "'He woulda took his pay an' raised hell in a whoreshouse,'" and the huge rabbit saying, "'You ain't worth a greased jack-pin to ram you into hell.'"? (p. 205) There is incongruity in the idea that Lennie seeks peace of mind through using the dead Aunt Clara and a non-existent rabbit to castigate himself. Incongruity of idea is also present in that a little old lady and a huge rabbit can pop out of Lennie's
semi-vacant head and use George's profane expressions with such ease. The incongruity of situation is seen in the entirety of the argument between Lennie and the realistic figures of his imagination. Humour of character is found not so much in Lennie, from whom the audience is never detached quite enough to escape the pathos, but in Aunt Clara and the rabbit. The incongruity between the characters of Lennie's imagination and the real Aunt Clara and the real rabbits is so great that both become extremely humorous characters within their very short presentation.

By combining the large incongruities of each of these four areas, Steinbeck succeeds in presenting an extremely incongruous episode which is also extremely humorous because the audience is sufficiently detached from its pathos. He achieves this detachment by projecting different facets of Lennie's consciousness through Aunt Clara and the rabbit. By presenting these conflicting facets of consciousness, Steinbeck succeeds in releasing his audience from the emotional involvement which he has built throughout the novel and to which he returns in the next and final episode. It is a mark of his craftsmanship that he is able to distance his audience from the episode itself without detaching it completely from the emotional involvement with Lennie, thus retaining a strain of pathos throughout the humorous episode.

In view of the fact that it is difficult to combine the four areas of humour and still retain naturalness of expression, Steinbeck attains the combination relatively often. His combination is generally successful, resulting in the richest
humour in his canon.

Although Steinbeck does not wish to be labelled a humorist, he experiments with a variety of literary forms which depend mainly on humour. Throughout his career he has utilized some form of tragicomedy, picaresque, tall tale, and fabliau. His first novel which exhibits traits of tragicomedy is *Tortilla Flat*, where the extremely humorous plot and action are resolved with the hero's death. The tragic reversal here is perhaps the weakest part of the novel, for Steinbeck forfeits the predominating lightness of tone which is the delight of the book. He is more successful in his next attempt at tragicomedy. In *Of Mice and Men*, which is perhaps his finest piece of writing, he carefully balances the humorous and the pathetic. For example, the progression from the death of the mouse (p. 159) to the death of the pup (p. 197) to the death of Curley's wife (p. 200) is paralleled by the increasingly humorous recounting of the pathetic dream of the tiny ranch, first by George to Lennie, (p. 163f.) then again by George to Lennie in Candy's presence, (p. 184) and finally by Lennie to Crooks. (p. 190) The dream is presented in humorous terms, and the negation of it, in the form of Lennie's unintentional harmfulness, is presented in serious terms. The dream and the negation merge in the final scene, where the Luger in George's hand eliminates the detachment which had, up to this point, made the recounting of the dream humorous. Steinbeck's only other attempt at tragicomedy is in the unsuccessful *The Moon is Down*. Here the failure is not so much in the mismatching of tones, for the novel can bear the
contrast of humour and pathos, but rather in the fact that Steinbeck was himself a stranger to his material. The combination of humour and pathos suffers from the resultant stiffness which pervades the entire novel.

The elements of the picaresque in *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* have already been mentioned.¹ It is interesting that Steinbeck's *picaros* tend toward the 'group-rogue' rather than the traditional single rogue-hero and his accomplice.² This is an effect of his group-man theory, which he held as early as his writing of "The Leader of the People,"³ in which the old man says, "'It wasn't Indians that were important, nor adventures, nor even getting out here. It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast....Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering.'" (LV, p. 302) Of his four primarily humorous novels,⁴ then, three show elements of the picaresque with group-rogue *picaros*, a fact that reveals the influence of his serious writing on his humorous works.

Oddly enough, although *Travels with Charley* is not fiction, there are traces of the picaresque in it. Steinbeck can be seen as a rogue who exploits society by travelling through it anonymously, garnering material for his book, with Charley as his accomplice. The fact that he named his pick-up truck "Rocinante," after Don Quixote's horse, indicates that he realizes that he may be "travelling about the crowded, mechanized atomic age..., but spiritually living in a past era which he has idealized." (Fontenrose, p. 138) Also, it is probable that the title was

Although the tall tale is one of the traditions of American humour, there is no instance in which Steinbeck uses it in its pure form. Any passage that is suggestive of the tall tale reveals the absence of one or more of its elements. The example already cited from Sweet Thursday is not a tall tale but the account of how normal events are exaggerated by Doc and Mack, with the suggestion that such stories can, in time, become mythical tall tales. In Tortilla Flat Danny's glorious end is presented in terms of the tall tale, but with the apology that "the reputed prowess of Danny may be somewhat overstated. One tenth of it would be an overstatement for anyone in the world." (p. 94) Here it is the process by which factual events can evolve into mythic proportions that is stressed, rather than the tall tale itself. The short story, "Johnny Bear," (LV, pp. 145-168) has ingredients of the tall tale, but emphasis is not on Johnny Bear's tremendous mimicking ability but on the disastrous disclosures resulting from this ability. His great prowess at mimicking is similar to the matchless abilities of traditional tall tale heroes, and the story is similar to the tall tale in its framework of narration. However, there is little humour in "Johnny Bear," for it is immediately obvious that the narrator is not exaggerating Johnny Bear's ability and therefore there is no incongruity in narration. The initial humour which arises from the exactness of the mimicking quickly vanishes as the
narrator and the reader become involved with the horror of the situation. In "St. Katy the Virgin," the story of a Christian sow, there are traces of tall tale elements in the improbability of events in such passages as, "[Katy] sat by beds of pain and her dear golden eyes brought relief to the sufferers," and "[she] spun like a top on the tip of her tail for one hour and three-quarters." (LV, p. 198) The account in Cannery Row of Josh Billings' death (pp. 303-304) also shows traces of the tall tale, for it is the exaggerated account of the death of a fictional character.

It is odd that a modern American author would write a story patterned on the fabliau, yet Steinbeck's first successful humorous story, "St. Katy the Virgin," is largely in this tradition. It is a bawdy story which satirizes orthodox religion and virginity, and takes place in medieval Ireland. It differs from the fabliau in that it is in prose, and also it incorporates elements of the fable in that the protagonist is an animal which has human attributes. In the story, the only traces of the American tradition are seen in the tall tale elements and in the predominating rural humour.

As in every other aspect of his writing, Steinbeck's success in the use of humorous literary forms does not follow any distinct pattern. His attempts are generally successful, yet there are lapses, such as in The Moon is Down, where he fails with tragi-comedy after using it with great success in Of Mice and Men. It seems that his passion for experimentation precludes evolvement toward perfection in any literary form, whether humorous or
otherwise.

In order to gain humorous effect, Steinbeck utilizes a variety of techniques, most of which take the form of innocuous humour. Through repetition he often intensifies the humour of things which are already funny, as he does through Mack's repeated "'I and the boys,'" (CR, ST) and through repeated reference to the obstinancy of the Hansen Sea-Cow (a thinly-disguised substitute for 'Johnson Sea-Horse'), the outboard motor which is initially described as refusing to run: "(a) when the waves were high, (b) when the wind blew, (c) at night, early morning, and evening, (d) in rain, dew or fog, (e) when the distance to be covered was more than two hundred yards." (SC, p. 21) Occasionally Steinbeck depends on repetition to provoke humour where it would not exist otherwise. For example, the first use of "'An' live off the fatta the lan....An' have rabbits!" is pathetic coming from the huge half-wit, Lennie. (MM, p. 163) Yet Lennie's enthusiasm for the dream becomes hilarious through the numerous repetitions and does not lose its humour until the last scene, where the pathos of the situation overcomes the detachment provided by the repetition. The humour which Steinbeck produces through repetition is usually good, although in The Moon is Down and The Winter of Our Discontent the repetition of character traits, especially of Madame Orden, Annie, (MD) and Ethan Hawley, (WD) becomes tiresome.

Steinbeck produces some very fine humour through reversal. When no one in the Palace Flophouse undertakes to house-break Mack's puppy, "she began to train herself. She got disgusted with wetting the floor and took to going outside." (CR, p. 342)
In describing the inveterate criminal, Joseph and Mary Rivas, Steinbeck writes: "He started again on his career and took a wrong turning, for he fell under the influence of a...priest.... Although Joseph and Mary realized he could never get rich in this job, he took a certain pleasure in being partly legal. It gave him the satisfaction most people find in sin." (ST, p. 9) His use of reversal does not always result in such light humour. He often manages, through this device, to change a serious incident into grotesque humour. An example of this is his description of Hubert Van Deventer, "a florid, hunting man who spent six months out of every year trying to shoot some kind of creature or other. Three months after the wedding he shot himself." (PH, p. 64)

Steinbeck often uses self-deprecation in both his fiction and non-fiction. Jim Casy repeatedly deprecates himself for shirking his responsibility as a preacher by seducing the young women of his flock, (GW) and Mack admits his selfish motives in throwing a party for Doc. (CR, p. 308) In Sweet Thursday Hazel insists that he is not good enough to be president of the United States. (p. 175) By ridiculing himself in his non-fiction, Steinbeck infuses his work with an intimacy which generates an appealing warmth of humour. In Sea of Cortez he says, "It is impossible to say how bad our moving pictures were--one film laboratory has been eager to have a copy of the film, for it embodies in a few thousand feet, so they say, every single thing one should not do with a camera." (p. 225) While overseas during the war he wrote: "What the correspondent really saw was dust.... He lay on his stomach, if he had any sense, and watched ants..."
crawling among the little sticks on the sand dune, and his nose was so close to the ants that their progress was interfered with by it." (OW, p. 157) In *A Russian Journal* he admits his meanness when he shocks Robert Capa by telling him, untruthfully, that there is a bald spot on the back of his head. (p. 143) In one of his articles he says that by moving to New York he "had become a fifth-rate celebrity," and in another he admits his theft of a small piece of drill core. In *Travels with Charley* he says, "My knowledge of Canuck French derives from motion pictures usually with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald, and it consists largely of 'By gar!'" (p. 64) It appears that Steinbeck's characteristic humility allows him great ease and naturalness in his use of self-deprecation.

Steinbeck's success in his use of meiosis as a humorous device may be attributed to the same cause which results in his successful use of self-deprecation. The two are related in that they are generated by the author's own characteristic humility. Both self-deprecation and meiosis tend to minimize or to understate events or details thereby lending a restraint which results in subtle humour. The humour is always successful in those episodes which depend on meiosis. For instance, when the Pirate brought his packages of food to Danny's house, the *paisanos* "received his bounty and made use of it: fresh fish, half pies, untouched loaves of stale bread, meat that required only a little soda to take the green out. They began really to live." (TF, p. 35) When Mack and the boys are driving to the frog hunt, "Eddie hit [a rooster] without running too far off the road." (CR, p. 305)
In the sale of raffle tickets for the Palace Flophouse, "Whitey No. 2's method was characteristically direct. The first man to refuse him got a rock through his windshield, and the news traveled." (ST, p. 89)

Steinbeck uses hyperbole fairly often, though not as frequently as he does the devices already discussed. He is rarely successful with it, except in a few instances, as in The Pastures of Heaven, where "Maria tugged at the reins as though she was [sic] pulling up a thunderously galloping steed. 'Steady, Lindo! Be calm!' she called. At the lightest pressure of the reins, Lindo turned to stone," (p. 118) and in Cannery Row, where Monterey is described as "a city with a long and brilliant literary tradition. It remembers with pleasure and some glory that Robert Louis Stevenson lived there." (p. 303) The former succeeds because the exaggeration in Maria's voice is in sharp contrast with the author's exaggeration of the horse's lethargy. The latter, though in the author's own voice, succeeds because of the satire which the hyperbole conveys. Most of the exaggeration Steinbeck uses is in his own voice, and when presented in this way it is usually unsuccessful. He describes the Salinas Valley as "that region which heaven unsuccessfully imitated," (EE, p. 134) Fauna's fur-piece as two martens "that were biting each other's heads off," (ST, p. 93) and a rented Rolls Royce as "a little younger than Stonehenge and in a little better condition." In Travels with Charley he uses a great deal of very poor exaggeration, such as: "If the other tire blew, there we were, on a wet and lonesome road, having no recourse except to burst into
tears and wait for death," (p. 184) and "The owner was a giant with a scarred face and an evil white eye. If he were a horse I wouldn't buy him." (p. 185) It is surprising that Steinbeck persists in using exaggeration in a way which results in humour of poor quality, for he uses it in *The Winter of Our Discontent* to reinforce the lame humour characteristic of Ethan Hawley. Such passages as, "since it had no owner I took it for our star. I tamed it and turned it back to fatten," (p. 49) suggest that Steinbeck recognizes the inferior quality of the device. Yet he continually mars his humour by using hyperbole in his own voice.

Although he makes relatively little use of anticlimax, Steinbeck creates excellent humour through his anticlimactic passages. For instance, James Flower says, "I think therefore I am...at least I think I am," (CG, p. 76) George Battle died at "sixty-five...of old age and a cough," (PH, p. 13) and Mr. Hartley "didn't like to work at night because of his eyes and because he liked to listen to the radio." After he howled "menaces at the German Empire," Pilon, for the duration of the war, "marched about Oregon with the infantry." (CR, p. 4) In *The Wayward Bus* there is a fine piece of anticlimax when Louis, after preening himself to attract Camille Oaks, "stepped through the door of the washroom with a kind of lordliness, and then had to back up because two men came...carrying a long crate...[marked] MOTHER MAHONEY'S HOME-BAKED PIES." (p. 99) In *A Russian Journal*, Steinbeck tells of a pocketknife that had a blade to take care of nearly all physical situations in the world, and some spiritual ones. It
was equipped with blades that were scissors, with blades that were files, awls, can-openers, beer-openers, corkscrews, tools for removing stones from a horse's foot, a blade for eating and a blade for murder, a screwdriver and a chisel.... We had it nearly two months, and the only thing we ever did with it was to cut sausage. (p. 144f.)

One of the characteristics of Steinbeck's writing is the ease with which he presents the grotesque. The one instance in which he fails with it is in "Fingers of Cloud," in which the incident of the horse heads in the fire barrel fails to generate the humour that he presumably intended.\(^{10}\) By the time he wrote The Pastures of Heaven, his handling of the grotesque had improved enough to enable him to describe even death with detachment. The deaths of both Hubert Van Deventer and John Battle are presented with humorous irony. (pp. 64, 14) In the same novel he describes Allen Hueneker, who "not only walked like an ape, he looked like an ape... Allen was so shy and so horrified at his appearance that he tried to grow whiskers to cover up his face but the coarse, sparse stubble grew in the wrong places and only intensified his simian appearance." (p. 117) The humour in this grotesque description is not evident until it is revealed that his "wife had married him because she was thirty-seven, and because Allen was the only man of her acquaintance who could not protect himself." Detachment from the pathos of Allen's appearance is completed when it is discovered that his wife is jealous to the point of fabricating stories of his prowess with women. (p. 118) The grotesqueness of Johnny Bear, who "looked like a great, stupid, smiling bear," (LV, p. 148) and could mimick perfectly anything he had heard, is humorous until the horrifying implications
of his ability are discovered. There is an element of the grotesque in the stories the paisanos tell one another. The story of Tall Bob Smoke (TF, p. 77f.) and the one of Old Man Ravanno (TF, pp. 78-81) are characteristic of the dark humour of the paisanos, described by Jesus Maria as, "'when you open your mouth to laugh, something like a hand squeezes your heart.'" (TF, p. 78) The account of the corporal whose baby died before he could grow up to be a general and steal as many wives as he wished, is also in this same dark vein of humour. (TF, pp. 57-59)

Steinbeck's presentation of the grotesque in The Moon is Down is extremely poor. Annie says of Alex Morden, who is to be executed, "'They've got no right to try him. He gave Molly a big red dress for her birthday,'" (p. 232) and Madam Orden's greatest concern after her husband is condemned to death is that he wear his chain of office. (p. 268) Such scenes fail because of the extreme frivolity with which they treat serious situations. It is possible that Steinbeck did not intend these passages to be grotesque, and that they have become so as a result of the general awkwardness prevalent throughout the novel.

Steinbeck is more successful in the occasional instances of the grotesque in his later works. In The Wayward Bus the story Juan tells Breed about the Mexican woman and Pancho Villa (p. 183) is similar in tone to the story of Old Man Ravanno in Tortilla Flat. The incident of the drunken baby in East of Eden has already been discussed. In "How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank" an amateur fortune teller, who admits that she is often wrong, prophesies that "Mrs. Winkle was going on a trip to Europe and
the next week Mrs. Winkle got a fishbone in her throat and choked to death."\(^{12}\)

Although much of Steinbeck's humour resembles low comedy in that his humorous characters are often simple, uneducated outcasts, it is seldom that he employs farce and slapstick. There are elements of farce in his earliest short stories, "Adventures in Arcademy\(^{13}\)" and "Fingers of Cloud."\(^{14}\) These are poor attempts at satire in which the humour is entirely unsuccessful. In the former there is attempted farce throughout, for the characters are one-dimensional and no motivation is apparent in any of the action. In the latter, Gertie's decisions appear to be unmotivated, and the reason for Pedro's keeping horse heads in the fire barrel is not explained within the context. In "St. Katy the Virgin" the humour is successful, for the action is boisterous and fast-moving, and the farce is given direction by the satire. The one-dimensional nature of the characters is evidenced by Katy's move from inexplicable badness to inexplicable goodness, and the motivations for her actions are contrived. *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* resemble farce in their series of exaggerated events, but in these the action is always motivated and the characters, at least in the last two, are fairly well developed. For instance, Joe Elegant agrees to help Hazel with his Prince Charming costume and Hazel's arrival at the masquerade seems merely farcical, for he wears a suit of "long gray underwear....The drop seat of the costume had been removed and in its place, right on the essential surface of Hazel himself, was painted a bull's eye in concentric circles
of red and blue." (ST, p. 127) That Joe Elegant was motivated to
dress Hazel in such a manner is evident from the fact that he is
a homosexual, from the narrator's comment, "Joe Elegant had
worked all day to get his revenge on mankind," (p. 127) and from
Mack's instant appraisal of Joe's intention. (p. 128) The farce
in The Short Reign of Pippin IV is reminiscent of the adolescent
attempts in Steinbeck's college stories. It fails because, as
with the other forms of humour in the novel, it is imposed on
the narrative rather than arising out of it.

Steinbeck employs slapstick more often than farce. He uses
it successfully in his humorous novels in instances where people
get thoroughly beaten for humorous effect. In Tortilla Flat
the paisanos brutally beat Portagee Joe for stealing the Pirate's
treasure, then, after the punishment is inflicted, tenderly dress
his wounds and keep his wine jar full. (p. 64f.) In Cannery Row
there is the fight during the first party which makes a shambles
of Doc's laboratory, (p. 328) the subsequent beating of Mack by
Doc, (p. 330) and the final battle at the second party when the
tuna boat crew insult Dora's girls by calling them whores during
their off hours. (p. 357) In Sweet Thursday Hazel hits Mack so
hard with an oaken stave "that his pants split," (p. 142) and Doc
succeeds in winning Suzy only because Hazel breaks his arm with
an indoor ball bat. (p. 169f.) The few passages of slapstick in
The Moon is Down, such as the one in which Annie throws boiling
water on the sentries, (p. 220) are unsuccessful. Though amusing
in themselves, in context their humour loses strength because
of the immediacy of the situation. The slapstick in The Short
Reign of Pippin IV fails for the same reason as does the farce. Such passages as, "Miss France, representing Joan of Arc, stood beside the throne...until she fainted from heat and the weight of her armor. She crashed with the sound of falling kitchenware during the royal oath," (p. 73) indicate the contrived aspect of the slapstick as well as its adolescent tone.

Steinbeck's close association with rural labourers of many nationalities in the Salinas Valley afforded him contact with a variety of folk humour, and traces of it are found in many of his novels. The story of Tall Bob Smoke and the one of Old Man Ravanno (TF, pp. 77-81) are suggestive of folk humour in their unsophisticated treatment of incongruous human behaviour. The account of the corporal and the dying baby also shows elements of folk humour. (TF, pp. 57-59) The last two were stories Steinbeck had heard from Mexican labourers when he worked in a sugar mill. The story told by Juan Chicoy about Pancho Villa and the widow reveals the same harsh elements of folk humour evident in the paisanos' stories. (WE, p. 183) Steinbeck makes use of this story again in The Winter of Our Discontent in order to satirize people's attitude toward money. (p. 177) These stories all have in common the grim humour of the grotesque. The story of Willie and the heifer in The Grapes of Wrath (p. 94) shows elements of folk humour in a lighter vein, as does the story of the finding of Tularecito in the early novel, The Pastures of Heaven. (p. 48f.)

It is not possible to discuss Steinbeck's humour without giving some consideration to his use of crudity, for crudity is
natural in the expression of many of the types of characters in his fiction. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Grampa feels he is still full "'a piss an' vinegar, '" (p. 107) and when corrected about his open fly he shouts, "'Why, I'll go aroun' a-hangin' out if I wanta!'" (p. 125) Tom says to the one-eyed man of his open socket, "'Ya stickin' it out like a cow's ass....Tell 'em ya dong's growed sence you los' your eye.'" (p. 245) The abundance of crudity caused much indignation over the publication of the novel, raising such objections as, "It has *Tobacco Road* looking as pure as Charlotte Bronte, when it comes to obscene, vulgar, lewd, stable language." When Alice Chicoy complains, "'[I]t's my time...and then this tooth ache,' Juan advises her, 'Take yourself a slug of liquor....That'll be good for both ends.'" (WB, p. 127) During the trip, annoyed with Van Brunt's continual taunts about loss of the franchise for the bus, Chicoy tells him, "'I can think where I would put that franchise, rolled up and tied with barbed wire.'" (WB, p. 207) Adam Trask refers to himself and Charles as two "'lonely old farts working our tails off.'" (EE, p. 104) Steinbeck's most subtle use of crude humour is in a conversation between Danny and Pilon.

"Here we sit," [Danny] began at last. "'--broken-hearted,' Pilon added rhythmically. "No, this is not a poem," Danny said. (TF, p. 7)

Here, humour is derived from the crudity contained in the rest of the well-known verse which remains unspoken. Despite the prevalence of crude humour in his work, Steinbeck uses it to convey the earthiness natural to many of his characters, not merely to create sensationalism.
Most of the wit used by Steinbeck is in his non-fiction. Passages such as Pippin's remark to his wife, "'Do not let us, like the Americans, hear the hens crowing,'" (SRP, p. 29) and Ethan Hawley's quip while putting on his tie, "'Be with you in a couple of tie-tying moments,'" (WD, p. 68) are lame attempts at wit, as are most of the witty passages in his fiction. However, his wit is more successful in his non-fiction. In his war correspondences he writes of the Italian reaction to defeat as "enthusiasm at being conquered." (OW, p. 171) Of the Arabs' reaction to being photographed, he complains that they would not appear "just relaxed and looking Arab....[E]ither they had seen too many Hollywood films of Valentino as an Arab, or Valentino had studied Arabs under the impact of the camera. We never caught them any other way except looking sternly offstage, always in profile and always noble." (OW, p. 189) Much of the wit in his articles is excellent. In describing the traffic in Rome he says, "At street intersections, beautiful policemen stood on boxes and executed ballet movements which had no effect on the traffic, except to slow it down a little." In the same article he writes, "The Communists had prepared a riot in [General Ridgeway's] honour," and later, "Writers are taken seriously in Italy and are accorded the same respect that Lana Turner's legs get in our country." When he is in danger of being challenged to a duel, he says, "I remembered the story of how Abraham Lincoln was once challenged and chose cow manure at five paces. I decided to borrow the weapon, with full credit to Lincoln." In another article he says of critics, "I don't
think critics should change; only our attitude toward them.
Poor things, nobody reviews them." In "Random Thoughts on
Random Dogs" he writes, "We breed Collies with their heads so
long and narrow that they can no longer find their way home." He speaks of his two sons as "well equipped in delinquency,
and describes the ocean-going derrick, CUSS I, as having "the
sleek race lines of an outhouse standing on a garbage scow."

The reason for the discrepancy in both the quality and
quantity of wit between Steinbeck's fiction and non-fiction lies
in the fact that in his fiction he is restricted to character­
ization, whereas in his non-fiction he is using his own voice.
In his earlier works his characters are too unsophisticated to be
capable of witticism. His first character who is witty is Lee,
in East of Eden. In the incident where Samuel Hamilton tells
Adam Trask the truth about his wife, considering it as 'medicine'
for Adam, Lee adheres to the metaphor by saying, "I'm no
antidote....It's true." (p. 306) Here the wit is in good taste,
for Lee is a strong character with a quick sense of humour. But
in The Winter of Our Discontent the characters are uninteresting,
and Steinbeck helps to characterize them by including poor
examples of wit in their dialogue. He is successful with the
characterization, but the wit is consequently very poor. In
most cases the wit in his non-fiction is successful.

Since Steinbeck relies a great deal on the ironic mode in
his fiction, it is natural that much of his humour is ironic.
His humorous irony first appeared in The Pastures of Heaven.
Although the entire novel is ironic in tone, the irony is serious
rather than humorous. The few instances of humorous irony occur mainly in the chapter pertaining to the Lopez sisters. After either gave herself to a customer, "she went directly to the little porcelain Virgin, now conveniently placed in the hall to be accessible from both bedrooms, and prayed for forgiveness." (p. 113) The humour of Mrs. Hueneker's jealousy of her husband is also ironic, for "everyone in the Pastures of Heaven knew how shy and terrified the ugly little man was." (p. 118) In Tortilla Flat the continual rationalizing of the paisanos is similar to that of the Lopez sisters. It is ironically humorous when Danny "found a keg of copper shingle nails, lost by the Central Supply Company. He had judged them jetsam because no member of the company was anywhere near." (p. 49) There is irony in the attitude of the Mayor's wife in The Moon is Down when she worries about problems of etiquette in the face of conquest, (pp. 215-217) and in Colonel Lanser's look of helplessness when Annie throws boiling water at his soldiers. (p. 220) Here, again, the humour fails because of its trivial nature. In Cannery Row much of the humour is in the ironic vein. It is ironic that Mack and the boys catch frogs to sell to Doc in order to get money to give Doc a party, (p. 307f.) and that Henri "sculptures" a thirty-five-foot boat, never intending to move it from its cement foundations among the pine trees. (p. 332) It is later revealed, in Sweet Thursday, that Henri was too afraid of the ocean ever to use the boat. (p. 3) There are rare examples of humorous irony in East of Eden such as when Kate checks herself from calling her son, Cal, a 'son-of-a-bitch.' (p. 512)
In *Sweet Thursday* Steinbeck uses humorous irony more than in any other novel. The entire episode in which Joseph and Mary Rivas grows marajuana in the Los Angeles Plaza is rich in irony. He gets the job as gardener through a priest, then cultivates marajuana in the public Plaza while the police are searching throughout Southern California for the source. Nor is it the police who discover the operation, but a thirteen-year-old girl who is the head of her "Beginning Botany" class. To culminate the irony, the police are powerless to act for fear of ridicule, for the marajuana "had been planted and nurtured by a city employee, freshened with city water, and nurtured with city manure." (p. 10)

There is similar humour in Fauna's training her prostitutes in etiquette, (p. 62) and in her pride in the gold-star girls who have married while active in the profession. (p. 75) Also, there are many instances of fine humorous irony in small incidents, such as when a "seagull with a broken wing engaged [Hazel's] kindly interest. He chased it, trying to help it, until it swam to sea and drowned." (p. 48)

There is little humorous irony in Steinbeck's latest works, for the irony becomes militant, and therefore satiric. There are only a few instances of irony in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, and these lack subtlety. For example, Charles Martel sells "a Louis Quinze make-up box to an elderly lady tourist for whom it had no practical value." (p. 21) Also, Pippin is not recognized, even by the queen, when he replaces his regal clothing with ordinary clothes. (p. 112) In *The Winter of Our Discontent* all the irony is militant. There is satiric intent even in the ironic Christian
names of the protagonist and his son, for Steinbeck, in recalling the revolutionary hero, Ethan Allen, makes a satiric thrust at modern America by juxtaposing its moral laxity with past integrity.

Steinbeck often creates humour through the ironic naming of places and characters. There is subtle irony in the name of Dora's brothel in two respects, both in the patriotic "Bear Flag" and in its designation as a "restaurant." (CR, ST) It is ironic that a flophouse is called "Palace," (CR, ST) and that Doc's small marine laboratory should bear the imposing name, "Western Biological Laboratories." (ST, p. 37) There is irony in naming a dim-witted vagrant "Hazel," (CR, ST) and an inveterate criminal "Joseph and Mary," (ST) and in changing "Flora," the name of the madame of a house which caters to the animal instincts of men, to "Fauna." (ST, p. 3)

Considering that there are a number of his fictional works which contain little or no humorous irony, it is surprising that Steinbeck makes considerable use of it in his non-fiction. In Once There Was a War he writes of Big Train Mulligan: "Should his officer be faint with hunger, Mulligan has a piece of chocolate to tide the captain over. What difference that the chocolate belonged to the captain in the first place...? The fact of the matter is that when he needs his own chocolate Mulligan is happy to give him half of it." (p. 104) A similar episode is the one in which Bugs carries the huge mirror on his back through the entire Sicilian campaign, only to have it fall and shatter the first time he hangs it in a room. (p. 169f.) Occasionally Steinbeck uses humorous irony in his articles.
In describing a strike in Salinas, he tells of the strike-breaker who, suspecting Communist agitation, publicly burned all the little red flags found on the highway, only to discover that they belonged to the survey crew of the Highway Commission.  

When writing about life insurance, Steinbeck is aware of his own ironic situation. The expected focus for humour here is the fact that insured people are more valuable when they are dead. Of his own case he writes: "The best insurance I can leave is a long list of copyrights. Therefore it is to the advantage of my heirs and dependents to keep me alive and well and working."  

In *Travels with Charley* he writes of a Filipino who told of a charm a witch doctor had given him to ward off evil spirits. The man did not know the meaning of the words, which were: "*In nomine Patris et Filiii et Spiritus Sancti.*" (p. 61)

In most cases when Steinbeck is ironic, he is successful, whether it is humorous or serious. His one noticeable failure is in *The Moon is Down*, where the irony hinges on trivialities, and so has little impact. At times his irony verges on satire. For instance, Hazel's attempt to help the seagull (*ST*, p. 48) suggests a satiric comment on people who, in attempts to help others, unwittingly do them harm. Except for a few instances, the irony in his last two novels is entirely militant.

Although Steinbeck uses only a few forms of militant humour, he uses them, especially satire, with such frequency and effectiveness that it is the militant aspect of his work which predominates. The other forms he uses are mock epic and parody,
which are forms of high burlesque. His one extended experiment with the mock epic proved successful, although one of the weaknesses of *Tortilla Flat* is that the parallels between it and *Morte d'Arthur* are not drawn clearly enough to assure the identification without the author's explanatory preface. Yet the novel as a whole was successful enough to bring him fame. It is interesting to note that those critics who see *Tortilla Flat* as a sentimentalized admiration for the *paisanos*'$ carefree way of life$^{29}$ do not consider that, by describing the *paisanos* in mock-heroic terms, Steinbeck disclaims the ideality of their way of life.$^{30}$ He satirizes not only materialistic society, which he does through subject matter, but also the *paisanos* themselves, as well as those who seek virtue through primitivism, by employing the mock-heroic form.

In a more restricted sense Steinbeck has employed mock-epic techniques in various short episodes in his works. In Chapter Two of *Cannery Row* he uses mock-heroic terms to describe Lee Chong as "an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register." (p. 278) He goes on to describe Mack and the boys as "the Beauties, the Virtues, and Graces. In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls." (p. 278) The frog hunt is also described in similar terms, beginning with: "During the millennia that frogs and men have lived in the same world, it is probable
that men have hunted frogs....The man with net or bow or lance or gun creeps noiselessly, as he thinks, toward the frog." (p. 313)

In *Sweet Thursday*, the new era described in "Hooptedoodle (1)" is given in mock-heroic terms: "Here were prodigies and portents....A six-legged calf was born in Carmel Valley. A cloud drifting in formed the letters O-N in the sky over Monterey. Mushrooms grew out of the concrete floor of the basement of the Methodist Church." (p. 12) Ethan Hawley's reaction to his son's bath is in mock-epic language: "'Somewhere you will find a mule has foaled and a new comet come into the sky.'" (*WD*, p. 264)

The few parodies which Steinbeck has written are relatively successful in their humour. They are found only in the earliest phase of his writing, but they are the best of his early work. Of his college writing, the only pieces worthy of notice are the two parodies, "If Eddie Guest had Written the Book of Job: HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" and its companion poem, "If John V.A. Weaver Had Written Keats' Sonnet in the American Language: ON LOOKING AT A NEW BOOK BY HAROLD BELL WRIGHT." The cleverness of the parody in these satiric poems lies in Steinbeck's ability to capture the form, tone and type of content of the originals. The only other place in which he uses parody is in "St. Katy the Virgin," in which, as Lisca notes, he parodies medieval arguments with hilarious effect. (*WWJS*, p. 94) Also, the episode in which Katy twirls on her tail in front of the altar (*LV*, p. 198) suggests a parody of Anatole France's "Our Lady's Juggler," in which the Virgin is more pleased by Barnaby's juggling, the only occupation at which he is proficient, than
with the great gifts of the other monks.\textsuperscript{32}

In his review of \textit{The Short Reign of Pippin IV}, Harry Thornton Moore suggests that Steinbeck is too soft-hearted to be a satirist,\textsuperscript{33} yet Steinbeck's work contains more elements of satire than of any other strain of humour. Although his college writings are poor attempts at satire, they are nevertheless indicative of his tendency toward satire in his subsequent works. In \textit{Cup of Gold}, which Carpenter finds a failure because it lacks humour, \textit{(SHC, p. 74)} the only humour of any consequence is the satire of the traditional emphasis by the English military on fortitude and reputation. \textit{(pp. 139-141)} Most of the humour in Steinbeck's first three novels is in \textit{The Pastures of Heaven}, and there much of it is satiric. Throughout the novel there are numerous small satiric thrusts pointing out general weaknesses in society. For instance, "T.B. Allen's 'they say' was his protection. He used it as newspapers use the word 'alleged'," \textit{(p. 17)} In describing Shark's ledger fortune, Steinbeck indicates the weakness of man who pretends power through the manipulation of money. \textit{(p. 33)} The incident concerning Robbie Maltby's new clothes is an indictment of the community which insists on the conventional way of life and is, at the same time, a defence of the Maltbys in their humorous unconcern for material possessions. \textit{(p. 106)}

Through the double-edged satire of \textit{Tortilla Flat},\textsuperscript{34} Steinbeck indicts not only the society which scorns the life of the paisanos, but also the primitivistic life of the paisanos themselves. The success of the novel can be attributed to the skill with which he
divides his satire. He attacks society through content, showing by Danny's experiences with his houses the burden of ownership. Yet through the mock-heroic presentation of the *paisanos* he indicts the irresponsibility of their way of life. There are no individual satiric passages in *Of Mice and Men*. However, the entire novel, in which the ultimate ideal is to tend rabbits, can be seen as a satire on the American Dream. The satire in *The Grapes of Wrath* is found mainly in the early chapters where Steinbeck attacks revivalist religions through Casy and in the interchapters, in which Steinbeck directs a number of attacks at unscrupulous business men such as landowners, (Chapter Five) car salesmen, (Chapter Seven) and second-hand dealers. (Chapter Nine)

Like *Tortilla Flat*, both *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* contain double-edged satire. Mack and the boys are presented in a manner which condemns the conventional standards of society, yet the sympathetic portrayal of Doc serves to debunk any idealization of primitivism. Also, like *Tortilla Flat*, both attack specific targets. In *Cannery Row*, hypocrisy is the target in the description of the rear entrance provided by the Bear Flag for "the city officials and prominent business men," (p. 315) and advertising is attacked when the flag-pole skater is used by Holman's Department Store to promote "a white sale, a remnant sale, an aluminum sale, and a crockery sale all...at the same time." (p. 322) The description of Henri serves as a satire on the modern artist: "Regularly he revolted against outworn techniques and materials. One season he threw out perspective. Another year he abandoned
red, even as the mother of purple. Finally he gave up paint entirely." (p. 332) Government is satirized when Dora finds herself "entangled in that curious enigma which said the business was illegal and then taxed her for it." (p. 315) In *Sweet Thursday* Steinbeck satirizes the Freudian writer in his portrayal of Joe Elegant who types his manuscript on green paper using green typewriter ribbon. "There wasn't a character in the whole of *The Pi Root of Oedipus* who wouldn't have made the observation ward." (p. 158) Steinbeck derides also the popularized writer in the passage: "The pile of green manuscript was three inches thick, and Joe Elegant was beginning to plan his photograph for the back of the dust cover; open collar, he thought, and a small, wry smile, and one hand relaxed in front of him with an open poison ring on the third finger. He knew which reviewers he could depend on and why." (p. 159) Steinbeck focuses on fraternal organizations when the country club dismisses Whitey No. 2 as caddie because he refused to join the members in taking a loyalty oath not to destroy the United States government. (p. 65) The inter-chapters dealing with "The Great Roque War" (pp. 35-37) and "The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival" (pp. 170-173) serve to convey Steinbeck's satiric attitude toward pretentious respectability. The satire of *Cannery Row* is more pronounced than that of its sequel, *Sweet Thursday*, because it is in *Cannery Row* that the main characters and situations are initially set up, and because in *Sweet Thursday* there is more concentration on plot. Malcolm Cowley's comment that *Cannery Row* might be a "poisoned cream puff"35 is apt, for the novel is an excellent satire well
disguised as pleasant entertainment.

There is a satiric tone throughout The Wayward Bus which is
directed against conventionalism. Steinbeck's feeling against
clubmen is seen in his Babbitt-like portrayal of the self-
righteous Elliott Pritchard. (p. 39-43) The satire is extended
when Pritchard is the only one of the passengers who is interested
in Horton's "'Little Wonder Artificial Sore Foot.'" (p. 45f.)
The tourist is satirized through Mrs. Pritchard who "didn't
want to go to Mexico. She just wanted to come back to her
friends having been to Mexico." (p. 64) East of Eden contains
only a few instances of satire, such as when the lazy daydreamer,
Joe Hamilton, becomes successful in advertising, where his faults
are seen as virtues, (p. 277) and when the whoremaster's business
suffers because "the decay of morality among girls dealt the
whorehouse its death blow." (p. 90) The episode of Adam Trask's
disastrous experiment of shipping lettuce in a refrigerated
box-car may be seen as a satire on the business man. No one
wished to invest in the scheme until the outcome became known.
When his venture failed, the business men were quick to condemn
him as a fool. (pp. 437-439)

In his last two novels Steinbeck is more satiric than he
has ever been. Although Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row and Sweet
Thursday are primarily satiric, the satire in them is not as
concentrated as that in The Short Reign of Pippin IV and The
Winter of Our Discontent. In these last two he is making
specific attacks on the American moral and political situations.
In Pippin he utilizes a hypothetical French situation in order
to point out weaknesses in American policy. Through the re-establishment of monarchy in France, he is able to diagnose an American reaction to it: "'It is the nature of American foreign policy to distrust liberal governments and strongly to favor the more authoritarian, which it considers the more responsible.'" (p. 58) Also, the king's first act is "to request a subsidy for his government from America for the purpose of making France strong against Communism, and an equal subsidy from the Communist nations in the interests of world peace." (p. 59) When Pippin's Uncle Charles advises him, he states his ideas for procedure in American terms, where details of office or party are turned over "'to one of the great advertising agencies.'" He suggests that something similar could be effected in France: "'If such a company can merchandise a president and a political party, why not a king?...In foreign relations their policy derives not from some disinterested public servant, but from doing the most profitable business with the principality in question.'" (p. 64) This situation parallels the one in Steinbeck's article, "Madison Avenue and the Election," where he discusses the announcement, "advertising agencies will again design their Presidential campaigns in 1956."36 The story of Pippin in France allows Steinbeck to ridicule many American traits and practices. News coverage is belittled when "The New York Daily News front page carried a headline, of which each letter was four inches high, that read: FROGS CROWN PIP." (p. 72) He derides the prestige sought through education which prompts Tod Johnson to attend "four universities--Princeton for clothes,
Harvard for accent, Yale for attitude, and the University of Virginia for manners." (p. 83) He ridicules the American pattern which demands that "the family expand to a dynasty," (p. 82) and the American-like beauty contest which causes Pippin to lament, "'The Folies Bergère is holding a competition....They are choosing a King's Mistress.'" (p. 62) The idea of using France as a framework for a satire on America is a clever one, but the humour is unsuccessful because, as Lisca points out, it is sophomoric in its "grotesque improbability and wordplay." (WWJS, p. 287) The fact that Steinbeck subtitles the novel "A Fabrication" is not sufficient excuse for the contrived quality of the work. In his attempt at sophisticated humour, he has concentrated on satire at the expense of setting and characters, the things with which he had been the most familiar in the past. It is necessary only to compare satiric passages, one from The Wayward Bus, the other from Pippin, to appreciate the difference in subtlety. Mr. Pritchard contemplates the word "Repent" which is painted on the high cliff near the stranded bus. "'Somebody went to a lot of trouble,' he said, 'a lot of trouble.' And he wondered who had financed such a venture." (WB, p. 271) Oblique revelations such as this contribute to the character of the type of man who is being satirized. But, when Tod Johnson confides to Pippin that "'Americans talk sex in the office and business in the bedroom,'" (SRP, p. 105) the comment, although satiric, is a mere flippancy lacking in connection to the context and included for its own sake.

The satire of The Winter of Our Discontent is more successful
than that of The Short Reign of Pippin IV. The fact that the satire is conveyed mainly through the characterization of Ethan Hawley and arises from a richer plot and setting results in a subtlety which is lacking in Pippin. Here, most of the satiric passages have moral implications. For instance, Ethan explains to his son that piracy is "'bigger and better organized now. They call it diplomacy'"; (p. 71) the teller says of the banker, "'Father Baker genuflects and opens the safe and we all bow down to the Great God Currency'"; (p. 132) and Ethan considers "how philanthropic the taking of a profit can be." (p. 111) However, the force of the satire is not derived from such isolated passages, but from the novel in its totality. The Winter of Our Discontent is Ethan Hawley's story and his is the voice of the Little Man, the clerk in a small urban grocery store. Even the lame sense of humour which Steinbeck attributes to Ethan adds to the satire. Here Ethan is as conventional as in his morals. Although he is constantly harangued by his wife and children for his lack of money and position, he struggles to do good in the upright New England tradition. That the novel is a satire on the Little Man, the vir bonus, is conveyed in the reversal of Ethan's attitude. Through dishonesty and treachery he gains wealth and a strong position in the town. But the Little Man who has come to the point where he realizes he must become dishonest in order to attain prestige and respect is overwhelmed to find that the younger generation already operates under this conviction. For Ethan discovers that his son cheated in writing the essay, "I Love America," and the boy's attitude is contained in his
retort to his father, "'Everybody does it....Everybody right to the top--just read the papers. You get to feeling holy, just read the papers. I bet you took some in your time, because they all do.'" (p. 277) Steinbeck's comment in "Our Rigged Morality" makes an appropriate synopsis of the statement made in this novel of the American situation: "We can't expect to raise our children to be good and honorable men when the city, the state, the government, the corporations all offer higher rewards for chicanery and deceit than for probity and truth." But the problem is one which has concerned Steinbeck for a long time, for he attributes a detailed ironic statement of it to Doc in Cannery Row:

"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. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second." (p. 336)

Steinbeck's inclination toward satire is evident in his non-fiction as well as in his fiction. There is a sheep hunt in Sea of Cortez from which the only gain is a handful of droppings picked up by one of the Indians. To satirize big game hunting, Steinbeck tells of how he had his share of the droppings mounted as a prized trophy. (p. 166f.) In his introduction to Once There Was a War, he satirizes bureaucracy in the passage: "Once when I felt a little bruised by censorship I sent through Herodotus's account of the battle of Salamis fought between the Greeks and Persians in 480 B.C., and since there were place names involved, albeit classical ones, the Navy censors killed the whole story."
He ridicules blind patriotism in speaking of the "huge and gassy thing called the War Effort...[M]ost strong of all in discipline...were the war-minded civilians, the Non-combatant Commandos of the Stork Club, of *Time* Magazine and *The New Yorker*, to jerk a correspondent into line or suggest that he be removed from the area as a danger to the War Effort."

Commenting on the future thruways across the United States, he observes that eventually "it will be possible to drive from New York to California without seeing a single thing."

In his articles he uses satire in his treatment of a great variety of issues including television shows and McCarthyism, Hollywood celebrities, comparison of national fishing habits, English cuisine, social status, money, eligibility for entry into the United States. The ease with which Steinbeck falls into the satirical vein, and the success he generally has with it, proves Moore's criticism of Steinbeck to be misleading. He is not too soft-hearted for satire, except when, in accordance with his biological theories, he is dealing with natural weaknesses. For he is viciously satiric in his indictment of those who are insensitive to the suffering of others and of those who impinge on the rights of others.

The variety of forms that Steinbeck's humour takes shows him to be as versatile in it as he is in form and subject. His frequent combination of humour of language, of idea, of situation and of character results in some superb humorous episodes. He has experimented, for the most part successfully, with a number of literary forms which depend mainly on humour, and he utilizes
a wide range of techniques to create humour. The tendency in his personal life toward humility appears in his writing as self-deprecation, and there is a great deal of humorous irony in his work. Yet the most persistent and most successful element in his humour is that which is militant, and of this, in both his fiction and non-fiction, satire is the most dominant. Even in his humorous novels, where he utilizes many forms of humour, satire is the most pervasive.
Although much of Steinbeck's work is satiric, there are actually four major ways in which he uses humour. For him, humour is a means to aid in characterization of his fictional figures, to control his distance from his material, to intensify, through comic relief, his serious writing, and to comment on situations in need of correction. There is no doubt that another intention of his humour is to entertain, for there are many humorous passages which serve no other function. For instance, there is the description of Doc's birthday cake: "This cake was not fortunate, for...[the pup] ate what she could of it, was sick in it, and finally curled up in its still warm dough." (CR, p. 327) The entertainment value of the entire novel, Sweet Thursday, is evident in that it was easily converted to the popular musical comedy, Pipe Dream. (WWJS, p. 277)

Through a humorous portrayal of traits, reactions and attitudes, Steinbeck successfully characterizes a number of his figures. Most of the characterization of the paisanos is effected through humour. As early as The Pastures of Heaven, where he portrayed the Lopez sisters, he realized the humour inherent in the paisano way of life. He presents the trait of rationalization in the sisters' sexual encouragement of their restaurant customers. (p. 113) In Tortilla Flat he characterizes repeatedly through this trait when Pilon convinces himself that to kill the rooster he desires to eat is an act of kindness:
Pilon mused, "Poor little bare fowl. How cold it must be for you in the early morning, when the dew falls and the air grows cold with the dawn. The good God is not always so good to little beasts." And he thought, "Here you play in the street, little chicken. Some day an automobile will run over you; and if it kills you, that will be the best that can happen. It may only break your leg or your wing. Then all of your life you will drag along in misery. Life is too hard for you, little bird." (p. 9f.)

The *paisano* carefree attitude toward morality is conveyed in the case of Maria and Rosa Lopez and in that of the residents of Tortilla Flat. Maria and Rosa simply go to the Virgin to ask forgiveness for giving themselves to customers to promote the sale of their cooking, after having decided that this practice is to be permanent. (*PH*, p. 113) The gallant lechery of Danny and his friends, presented in such humorous terms, establishes their character as naive and appealing.

Most of the few instances of humour in *The Red Pony* serve to characterize Jody Tiflin. When the pony bit him, Jody "regarded his bruised fingers. 'Well,' he said with pride—'Well, I guess he can bite all right.'" (p. 109) When his mother scolded him for hurting the dog, "Jody felt mean..., so he threw a rock at Mutt." (p. 123)

Lennie's enthusiasm and simplicity are shown through humorous repetition, and George's pathetic position as Lennie's guardian is emphasized humorously through crudity of expression in such passages as Aunt Clara's "'He woulda took his pay an' raised hell in a whore house....You'11 jus' stick around an' stew the b'Jesus outa George all the time.'" (*MM*, p. 205) Grampa Joad is characterized mainly through humour, and much of Casy's character
is developed through humorous passages such as, "'An' here with all that responsibility on me I'd just get 'em frothin' with the Holy Sperit, an' then I'd take 'em out in the grass.'" (GW, p. 30)

Steinbeck is unsuccessful in his attempt to characterize through humour in *The Moon is Down*. His unfamiliarity with the people and the situation results in the stilted handling of such characters as Mayor Orden, who, while waiting to receive the conquerors, is "'even more upset about having his eyebrows trimmed than his ears'"; (p. 213) Madame Orden, who, in the same situation, worries about etiquette; (p. 215) and Annie, who throws boiling water on the enemy sentries. (p. 220) Perhaps the only place in this novel where Steinbeck is successful with characterization through humour is in the case of Joseph, but he is merely a stereotype of the meticulous, perverse butler. He is described as habitually scowling "at furniture, expecting it to be impertinent, mischievous, or dusty. In a world where Mayor Orden was the leader of men, Joseph was the leader of furniture, silver, and dishes." (p. 212)

In *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, most of the figures are characterized primarily through humour. Mack and the boys are presented entirely in humorous terms. Even their depression is made funny. After the first devastating party at Doc's laboratory, a "black gloom settled over the Palace Flophouse.... Hughie and Jones sat for a while staring into space and then morosely they went over to the Hediondo Cannery and applied for jobs and got them. Hazel felt so bad that he walked to Monterey and picked a fight with a soldier and lost it on purpose." (CR, p. 334)
At times Steinbeck uses even the most minor humorous incidents to characterize. When Mack felt particularly depressed, "he went out of his way to kick a dandelion flower." (ST, p. 56) Dora and Fauna are always presented humorously also. During "the busiest time the girls of the Bear Flag ever had," Dora observed that "she could have used the total membership of the old ladies' home." (CR, pp. 315, 316) When Dora died, the Bear Flag was taken over by her sister, Fauna, who "came down from San Francisco, where for some years she had been running a Midnight Mission...at a profit. She had been a silent partner all along...and continued, after hours at least, to transform the Bear Flag into a kind of finishing school for girls." (ST, p. 3)

Unlike these characters, Doc, as the Huck figure, is presented mainly in serious terms as when he finds the dead girl floating in the ocean, (CR, 321) and in the description of his appreciation of classical music. (CR, p. 353) Yet Steinbeck portrays him often in humorous terms. For example, "Doc tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and the dogs look up and smile at him," (CR, p. 284) and when he orders a beer milk shake he explains he has "'a bladder complaint....Bipalychae torsionectomy, the doctors call it. I'm supposed to drink a beer milk shake. Doctor's orders.'" (CR, p. 320) As the central character of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, Doc is portrayed, also, through his reactions to the humorous aspects of the other characters. For example, when Hazel asks the question about the stink bugs, "'what they got their asses up in the air for?!" Doc's answer
reveals a great deal of his own personality: "'I think they're praying....[T]he really incredibly remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable. We can only use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did something as inexplicable and strange we'd probably be praying--so maybe they're praying.'" (CR, p. 288f.) Also, Doc serves to point up the humour in the other characters: For, as Huck figure, he is Steinbeck's ideal man and the other characters, in contrast, appear incongruous and therefore humorous.

Steinbeck uses satire in The Wayward Bus to bring out Mr. Pritchard's character as a conventional clubman, and in The Short Reign of Pippin IV to portray Charles Martel as a shrewd business man. The entire novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, hinges on the character of Ethan Hawley, who is portrayed mainly through his insipid sense of humour which allows such inane terms of endearment for his wife as: 'Miss Mousy,' 'rabbit footling mine,' 'rumpled duck,' 'duck blossom,' 'Pigeon flake,' 'insect-wife,' and 'carotene.'

One of the most interesting aspects of Steinbeck's humour is his use of it to establish the specific distance he wishes to place between himself and his material. He often uses humour to present, in a detached way, subjects which could easily become sentimentalized, and conversely, to personalize objects and animals which would otherwise remain impersonal. He uses humour to objectify mainly in Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, where his inclination to sentimentalize the paisanos and Mack and the boys is checked by the humorous treatment of them. Those critics who call the two earlier novels sentimental
seem to overlook Steinbeck's humorously objective treatment of
the characters he is accused of sentimentalizing. The humour of
*Tortilla Flat* is accurately assessed by both Whipple and Lisca
who feel that it keeps the characters at a proper distance.\(^2\)
There is some truth in the accusation that *Sweet Thursday* is
sentimental\(^3\) for in this elegy of the Ricketts-Doc figure,
Steinbeck cannot refrain from concluding the story with a picture
of Doc, "driving off in the sunset with his princess by his
side." (Watt, p. 101) He still manages to objectify Mack and the
boys but Doc, who represents, in *Cannery Row*, the Steinbeck hero,
the man who is extremely proficient in his occupation,\(^4\)
degenerates into a comic figure once his self-reliance has turned
into a need for companionship. Steinbeck is himself too involved
with the memory of Ricketts, and he fails in his attempt to
objectify Doc.

There are many instances in which Steinbeck uses humour to
bring impersonal subjects closer to his audience. In his non-
fiction he often gives mechanical objects an almost human
character through humorous personification. His extensive
description of the "Hansen Sea-Cow,"\(^5\) in such passages as: "It
hated Tex, sensing perhaps that his knowledge of mechanics was
capable of diagnosing its shortcomings," (SC, p. 21) is one of
his finest examples of humorous personification. Steinbeck
shows his attachment to various old automobiles through the
same device. He says of a car which inexplicably stopped at
regular intervals: "I think it had a nervous breakdown."\(^6\) His
old Model T is described as having "an intelligence not exactly
malicious, but...loving a practical joke....It ran perfectly when I was in blue jeans, but let me put on my best suit and a white shirt, and maybe a girl beside me, and that car invariably broke down in the greasiest possible manner." In the same article he describes another car which waited until he was driving his mother home from the station before it spewed out the cornmeal he was using as a radiator seal.

Steinbeck personalizes not only mechanical objects, but also entire impersonal events. For example, the descriptions of the Sea-Cow and the humour of other minor passages, combined with his casual narrative technique, serve to make more palatable the impersonal scientific theories he presents in *Sea of Cortez*. He uses humour in a similar manner in his article, "High Drama of Bold Thrust Through Ocean Floor." The scientific project of drilling through the ocean floor for sample cores of strata is humanized by Steinbeck's humorous description as well as by his informal narration. He depicts the barge, CUSS I, in a number of humorous ways: "It waddled like a duck," (p. 111) "[lurched] like an old sow," (p. 118) and looked like "an outhouse standing on a garbage scow." (p. 111) He describes the storms humorously in personal terms. When he asks for his eggs straight up, the cook replies, "'Better have 'em scrambled so I can keep them in the pan.'" (p. 118) The violence of the storm is portrayed through the action of a chair which "came up fighting and tried to beat its way to freedom through an iron bulkhead. We lassoed it going by, threw it and tied it down." (p. 118)

Steinbeck is extremely skilful in his use of humour to
humanize animals. His first attempt, in "Adventures in Arcademy," is unsuccessful, but the humorous personification of the bad sow in "St. Katy the Virgin" is well handled. In *Tortilla Flat* the Pirate's dogs are humorously presented as almost human companions of their master, for they are "very respectful toward him, and very solicitous for his happiness." (p. 29) It is interesting that in this novel Steinbeck uses humour at times to increase and at times to diminish the distance from his subject. In *The Red Pony* he presents "the big serious dog" in humorous terms, not only through its name, "Doubletree Mutt," but also by giving it a character in such passages as, "No matter where he was hurt, Mutt limped." (p. 123) In *Cannery Row* he goes so far as to attribute dialogue to the captain's pointer in the passage: "Among her legs the big fat wiener pups nuzzled and bumped for milk and the bitch looked patiently up into Mack's face saying, 'You see how it is? I try to tell him but he doesn't understand.'" (p. 311)

In a number of his novels Steinbeck uses comic relief to intensify the harsh aspects of his work. He does this most extensively in *Of Mice and Men*, in which the humorous portrayal of the dream is a countertheme which intensifies, through its contrast, the pathos of the main theme. The few instances of humour in *The Red Pony* serve to increase the involvement with Jody, thereby increasing the force of the pathos in his experience. The humorous antics of Grampa Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* are in sharp contrast to the bleakness of the exodus, and consequently emphasize the desolation. Apparently Steinbeck
attempted to intensify the pathos of *The Moon is Down* through the use of humour in such passages as Annie's "'I tell you, Joseph, things can go too far--trampling in and out all hours of the night, shooting people.'" (p. 232) However, the humorous passages are so unreal in their triviality that they detract from, rather than emphasize, the pathos. Perhaps he realized the failure of comic relief in this novel, for it is the last time he makes use of it.

In *Cannery Row* Steinbeck very successfully uses contrast of a different nature from comic relief. Instead of using humorous passages to emphasize pathos, here he occasionally abandons the humorous tone and focuses on intensely harsh incidents. In the middle of the humorous description of Monterey there is the chilling account of William's suicide: "His hand rose and the ice pick snapped into his heart. It was amazing how easily it went in." And immediately the casual, partly humorous tone of the narrative returns: "William was the watchman before Alfred came. Everyone liked Alfred. He could sit on the pipes with Mack and the boys any time." (p. 281) Similarly, the humorous description of Lee Chong is interrupted by the account of Horace Abbeville's suicide, which the narrator admits "has nothing to do with the story." (p. 276) After giving up his old warehouse to settle his debt with Lee Chong, Horace "went across the lot and past the cypress tree and across the track and up the chicken walk and into the building that had been his, and he shot himself on a heap of fish meal." (p. 276) Also, there is the startling discovery by Doc when he "gently reached down and parted the
brown algae. Then he grew rigid. A girl's face looked up at him, a pretty, pale girl with dark hair. The eyes were open and clear and the face was firm and the hair washed gently about her head. The body was out of sight, caught in the crevice." (p. 321) It is as though Steinbeck, aware of the sense of unreality created by his humorous tone, attempts to anchor his novel to reality through these vivid incidents which he introduces with such shocking abruptness.

That Steinbeck's extensive use of humour in a novel results in an unreality of tone is evidenced in Tortilla Flat. But in Tortilla Flat it was his intention that the story have an unreal, fairy-tale quality in order to convey its parallel to the Arthurian legend. Also, the presentation of the paisano life, in its remoteness from the town of Monterey and from the American scene in general, benefited from the dream-like treatment. Cannery Row, however, where the life of one American street is central to the story, demanded a more acute sense of actuality which was provided by Steinbeck in two ways. Not only did he infuse the novel with short gripping incidents similar to the ones mentioned above, but he also interpolated serious chapters such as the one pertaining to the old Chinaman who disappeared each night between the pilings of the waterfront and appeared each morning with his basket heavy and dripping, (Chapter IV) and the one describing the gopher's unsuccessful attempt to establish his home in the vacant lot. (Chapter XXXI) The serious chapters, actually outside the movement of the narrative, impose reality on the Cannery Row setting. Also, like the interpolated
chapters which universalize the plight of the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath*, they expand and enrich the events of the story.

In *Sweet Thursday*, where such serious interpolations are missing, the tone of unreality is as blatant as the fairy-tale motif inherent in the Snow White masquerade party at the Palace Flophouse. Two chapters do appear, "The Great Roque War" (Chapter 8) and "The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival," (Chapter 38) which are irrelevant to the main plot, but they are highly humorous themselves and therefore serve merely to intensify the unreality. Thus, *Sweet Thursday*, although its humour is as successful as that of *Cannery Row*, is in no way comparable to the earlier novel in artistic quality. In *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* there is no attempt to anchor the hypothetical events to any sense of probability, because the story, subtitled "A Fabrication," is intended to be mere conjecture. The novel, however, is not so successful as *Tortilla Flat*, which also contains intended unreality. The failure of *Pippin*, then, cannot be attributed to the lack of balance between reality and unreality. It is, rather, the result of Steinbeck's attempt at a sophisticated, urban humour, with which he was, at that time, less skilful than with the robust, earthy humour of the three earlier novels.

It has already been stated that the humour which predominates in Steinbeck's work is militant. Through his use of humour as a means of derision, he is showing the need for correction, and satire is his main weapon. Although some of his satire is
directed at matters of little importance, such as fishing, food, and television, it is, for the most part, directed at issues which cause major concern to the humanist. He is concerned with such issues as political corruption, incompetent bureaucracy, hypocrisy in religion, moral degeneration, materialism and social stratification. At times he treats an unimportant issue in order to use it in his attack against a major one, as when his satire on television serves as a means to indict McCarthyism. Much of Steinbeck's writing reveals his vital concern over current problems. He is concerned with labour crises in "Dubious Battle in California," In Dubious Battle, the collection of newspaper reports entitled Their Blood is Strong, and The Grapes of Wrath. He voices his disturbance over the ignorance which leads to disastrous health conditions in The Forgotten Village, over crime among teenagers in "Some Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency," and over the Negro problem in "Atque Vale" and Travels with Charley. (p. 255) That these concerns are voiced, not in the satiric vein but with grim seriousness, is indicative of Steinbeck's reaction to matters of such crucial importance. It appears that when he is faced with crucial matters demanding urgent solution, such as starvation of labourers and their families in California, deaths of Mexican children because their parents have a superstitious fear of medicine, (FV) and abuse of Negro children in Arkansas, he is too involved to present them with any hint of lightness, but attacks with serious directness. Satire, which he finds too indirect a method in these cases, he uses to treat problems
which, though often serious, are not of a crucial nature. For him, satire is an effective weapon against the perennial social, moral and political injustices which do not require immediate solution. In the one case, his reaction is one of direct aggression while in the other, his desire to correct takes the form of pseudo-aggression which finds outlet in the use of satire. Thus, Steinbeck's use of satire may be seen as one of the means to explain the fluctuation between his humorous and non-humorous works, an aspect of his writing which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The uses Steinbeck makes of humour show that he is not writing merely to entertain but that he is manipulating his humorous material for artistic and humanistic purposes. He is usually successful in his use of humour to characterize figures and to intensify the harshness in his serious works through comic relief, and he always succeeds in his use of serious passages within a humorous work to combat unreality. The skilful ways in which he uses humour to personalize factual material and to humanize non-human subjects, and also to distance personal material, have become recognizable characteristics of his writing. His stature as a humanist, established by his sympathetic treatment of the human condition, has been increased by his repeated use of satire as a corrective weapon.
Chapter Six
A Chronological Study of Steinbeck's Humour

A chronological examination of Steinbeck's career is made here to determine the pattern of humour throughout his work. The quality and quantity of humour in each work is considered and related to the quality of the work as a whole. In determining the pattern, humour of his non-fiction is also considered, not for its quality but for the information it supplies in regard to the fluctuation from humorous to serious works. Steinbeck's relation to his material is also considered, for the degree of familiarity he has with his subject has a direct bearing on the success of the humour. The works are dealt with according to the time of writing rather than the date of publication for much of his work, especially the earlier writing, was not published for some time after it was completed.

It is significant that Steinbeck's first attempts at writing were humorous works. In the satirical stories and the verses which he wrote during his college years, he attempts nothing beyond humour. Although they fail because of his adolescent humour, their militant aspect indicates one of the major trends in his later work. His familiarity with the authors he was imitating accounts for the fact that the parodies are the best of these early writings. In the first three novels that he published, a relationship can be seen between the quality of the fiction, the amount of humour, and his familiarity with his material. The first two which he wrote, *Cup of Gold* and *To a God*
Unknown, are unsuccessful primarily because they are the author's attempts to find a suitable mode of expression. In *Cup of Gold* the events, setting and characters are unfamiliar. Even the time (the seventeenth century) is remote. In *To a God Unknown* most of the characters are unfamiliar to Steinbeck, for the Waynes are newcomers from Vermont. The Californian setting and such local characters as Juanito and the *paisanos* who come to Joseph Wayne's fiesta are familiar to the author but this familiarity is offset by the strained attempts at symbolism throughout the novel which curb the ease of the writing. Here there are no attempts at humour. The description of the priest dismantling the statues of the portable altar could be humorous for he "did it well, genuflecting before each one before he took it down and unscrewed its head." (p. 85) Yet Steinbeck makes no more of the incident than to present it as direct description, leaving the potential humour and satire undeveloped within the serious context. With *The Pastures of Heaven*, however, Steinbeck arrived at the style which marks the finest of his later works. Here he shows familiarity with both character and setting, and there is considerable improvement in the writing as well as an increase in the amount of humour, which is successful. It appears, then, that when at ease with his material, Steinbeck tends not only to write better, but to use more humour.

Although the first three parts of *The Red Pony* were published in novel form in 1937, and were included in *The Long Valley* in 1938, the first two, "The Gift" and "The Great Mountains," were separately published in 1933. (*WWJS*, p. 92f.) Here, again,
Steinbeck is familiar with the characters and setting for he is describing the Salinas Valley where he grew up, and real people with whom he was in contact all his life. The writing here is excellent, and merits Carpenter's remark: "These stories... announce the literary maturity of the author." (SHC, p. 77)

The humour, also, is of high quality. It is not the quantity of humour which is noteworthy, for there is very little of it, but the ease with which it arises out of the materials of the story. It is an integral part of the fiction in that it functions to characterize the central figure, Jody. Its amount is in keeping both with the seriousness of Jody's character as a young boy among adults, and with his experience with birth and death.

It is probable that most of the stories in *The Long Valley* were also written about the time that the first parts of *The Red Pony* appeared. (WWJS, p. 92f.) Except for "St. Katy the Virgin," these stories are very similar to *The Pastures of Heaven* as far as characters and setting are concerned. Life in the Salinas Valley is rendered in realistic episodes which leave little room for humour. Steinbeck's familiarity with his material results in stories which are, for the most part, excellent, and the little humour that there is apart from *The Red Pony* is in "Johnny Bear" and is of high quality. "St. Katy the Virgin" is a completely humorous return to the satire of his juvenilia. Here the satire is far more successful than in the college stories, eliciting the comment from French: "It is perhaps regrettable that he abandoned this style, for he excels as a satirist." Steinbeck made another return to the satire of his juvenilia, this time
in the eight unsuccessful poems published in 1935 under the pseudonym, Amnesia Glasscock.

_Tortilla Flat_ was one of Steinbeck's works which was not published immediately after it was written. He finished it about the time of the publication of the first two parts of _The Red Pony_. (WWJS, p. 92) In its creation, he was able to write with more ease than ever before, for not only were the _paisanos_ and the California setting familiar to him, but he had already treated both the characters and the setting fictionally in _To a God Unknown_, _The Pastures of Heaven_ and _The Red Pony_. The events, too, were familiar ones, for the life of Danny was based on that of a former Monterey _paisano_ called Benny. Steinbeck's dedication of the book to Susan Gregory acknowledges his debt to her for the information. (Moore, p. 36f.) _Tortilla Flat_ is humorous in its entirety, and the humour is of high quality. The satire of the earlier works is refined into the subtle, double-edged satire which is directed at the society which scorns the _paisanos_ as well as at the _paisanos_ themselves and the carefree, irresponsible life that they lead. Here, Steinbeck's familiarity with his material results in an artistic success as well as in a great deal of very fine humour. It is no wonder that Watt, when speaking of the novel, sees Steinbeck as expanding "into the comic with a burst of energy which suggests... a new confidence with respect to technique and subject matter." (p. 38)

After the humorous, lightly satiric _Tortilla Flat_, Steinbeck wrote the grimly austere _In Dubious Battle_. The change in tone
between these two novels is the most radical in all the chronology of Steinbeck's works. In Dubious Battle is a violent novel of protest containing only the barest trace of humour. The setting, characters and events of the novel were familiar to Steinbeck, and he had written earlier of labour agitation in "The Raid." This is the first novel in which he was entirely familiar with his material and yet introduced no humour. The explanation for the lack of humour lies in his tendency, discussed in the previous chapter, to treat matters of urgency with serious directness. For him, the issues at stake with the fruit pickers were crucial. Although he presented the problem through the medium of the novel, he was too concerned with the urgency of the actual situation to use even militant humour.

In Of Mice and Men Steinbeck again presents characters and setting familiar to him. Moore comments on the novel: "A writer deep in the lore of his own people feels (in many cases unconsciously) a folkways compulsive: the actual and mythical experience of his people helps to generate his material. But the final shaping of it depends upon the artist's own vision." (p. 50) This comment is a telling one in view of the use of humour in the novel. Perhaps Steinbeck felt the tension between the actual and the mythical experience in the story of Lennie and George, but it was his own vision which shaped the material into a fine balance between the serious and the humorous veins. For in Of Mice and Men, the mythical experience of the dream is represented in humorous terms while the actual experience which parallels it is treated in serious terms. The two are so
balanced that each comments on and intensifies the other. The result is excellent quality in the humour as well as in the writing as a whole. Although the novel appears between Steinbeck's two major novels of social protest it is not a protest novel, but the moving presentation of the interdependence of men. Because he is not dealing with problems of great urgency, Steinbeck is at leisure to counterpoint the serious with the humorous.

Immediately after he finished *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck wrote a number of articles on the labour crises in California. "*Dubious Battle in California*" and the series of articles entitled "*The Harvest Gypsies,*" ([WWJS, p. 144](#)) later collected under the title, *Their Blood is Strong*, are factual accounts of the hardships and injustices suffered by the migratory workers and their families. The urgency of the situation provoked Steinbeck to aggressive treatment similar to *In Dubious Battle*, where he was too concerned with the problems to treat them with any hint of humour.

By the time of the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck had great familiarity with his materials. He had known migrant labourers all his life, had worked with them, and had written about them in novels and articles. *Their Blood is Strong* presents the specific problem facing the migrants from the central states. Immediately before starting *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck had travelled with migrants from Oklahoma, and had lived and worked with them after they arrived in California. ([WWJS, p. 143](#)) The humour in the novel, centered around Tom Joad, Casy and
Grampa, and presented in the satire of the inter-chapters, arises with natural ease out of the characters and situations. It is important to note that the humour appears early in the novel, before the Joads arrive in California. Steinbeck is not primarily concerned with the mechanization of Oklahoma for, although it means that the people must leave their homes, they still have hope for work and land in California. His concern is over the urgency of the situation in California, where the migrants are faced with deprivation, persecution and starvation. In the latter part of the novel, as in "Dubious Battle in California," Their Blood is Strong, and In Dubious Battle, there is a significant absence of humour. Where Their Blood is Strong is the journalist's indictment of California for being "so stupid, so vicious and so greedy that it cannot feed and clothe the men and women who help to make it the richest area in the world,"11 The Grapes of Wrath is the artist's indictment of a society which allows gross injustice to a part of itself.

Steinbeck's next two works, The Forgotten Village and Sea of Cortez, are non-fiction. In both he is familiar with his material. He was in direct contact with the inhabitants of the Mexican village which he studied for several months, and he participated in the marine biology expedition into the Gulf of California. In these works the amount of humour indicates his degree of involvement. The Forgotten Village is a documentary portraying the critical state of ignorance and superstition in the Mexican village. His concern over the immediate danger, especially to children, of disease is revealed in the serious,
direct treatment which is devoid of humour. On the other hand, his treatment of the leisurely, scientific journey in quest of marine specimens contains a great deal of unpretentious humour which arises naturally out of the events of the trip.

Before the United States entered the war, Steinbeck had started to write the play-novelette, *The Moon is Down.* (WWJS, p. 186) Except for the unsuccessful *Cup of Gold,* this was the first novel in which he was unfamiliar with his characters, setting and events. And the failure of the work, as well as of the humour, attests to his unfamiliarity. It is difficult to explain why he uses so much humour in this novel. Up to this point he did not write humorously unless he was at ease with his material, nor did he use humour when he was concerned with a crucial situation. Obviously, in *The Moon is Down* he is not at ease and the situation involving the execution of hostages by an invader must surely have struck him as crucial. Perhaps he felt that the extremely objective rendering of the material, resulting from his own remoteness from the situation and his attempt to remain unbiased, demanded the personalizing effect of humour. Unfortunately, in this instance, the humour only adds to the remoteness and unreality of the subject.

*Bombs Away* (1942) and his war correspondences (1943), collected under the title, *Once There Was a War* (1958), are factual accounts of wartime situations. In both cases, Steinbeck was familiar with the material because of his personal participation. The former is a straightforward, humourless account of the training of bomber crews, and the latter is mainly the
description, often humorous, of human reactions to the demands of war. In *Once There Was a War*, as in *The Moon is Down*, it is difficult to explain the presence of so much humour, although this time it is of better quality, rising naturally out of events which he witnessed. Perhaps, again, he felt that humour would personalize the coldness of war. Or perhaps his realization that "our species has learned nothing, can as a race learn nothing—that the experience of ten thousand years has made no impression on the instincts of the million years that preceded," dulled the edge of the urgency, making him feel that war is a natural, unchangeable preoccupation of the human race.

Before the war had ended Steinbeck again surprised critics by a radical change in his writing. With the apparent return to the light humour of *Tortilla Flat* in his second humorous novel, *Cannery Row*, he seemed to negate the previous ten years of his social protest and concern with the war. It is probable that he wrote the novel because he was dejected by the war, (WWJS, p. 197) but a careful examination of the work reveals that it is not merely escapist literature. Steinbeck's anger with the complacency over the war prompted this condemnation of respectability and insensitivity. In *Cannery Row* Steinbeck is very close to his material. There is no doubt that much of the novel is autobiographical. French sees it as "an attempt to recapture...the life with Ed Ricketts in the thirties." (p. 27) The introduction to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), entitled "About Ed Ricketts," reveals the striking similarity between Ricketts and Doc. The material, then, was extremely
familiar to Steinbeck. Humour rises as naturally out of the material as it does in *Tortilla Flat*, but here the novel is controlled by the serious inter-chapters which serve not only to contrast the humour but also to comment on the action throughout. Steinbeck may have been conscious of a tendency in *Cannery Row* similar to that in *Tortilla Flat* and the opposite to that which faced him in *The Moon is Down*. Because of his great involvement with the material, he used humour to objectify it. However, there was the danger that unrelieved humour would result in the dream-like tone of *Tortilla Flat*. The device of serious inter-chapters gave him a means of controlling his material and anchoring it to reality. The novel is as successful in its humour as it is in its artistry.

With *The Pearl*, which was written in 1945, (French, p. 111) Steinbeck returns to the simple, serious style of most of the stories in *The Long Valley*. The only humour is the very bitter satire, presented through the acts of the doctor and the priest, against people whose attitude changes toward someone who has become suddenly wealthy. And the portrayal of the pearl buyers is reminiscent of the satire against unscrupulous business men in *The Grapes of Wrath*.14

In *The Wayward Bus* Steinbeck moves from the serious tone of *The Pearl* to a sharp satire on respectability, insensitivity and pretentiousness. He is again working with the familiar materials of his California background, and the humour is natural to the characters. The objects of his attack are not matters of urgency, and therefore he feels at ease to treat them satirically.
When he finished *The Wayward Bus*, Steinbeck became concerned with the cold war, and organized a trip to Russia with the photographer, Robert Capa, in order to see the people as human beings rather than as a potential enemy. The outcome of the visit was *A Russian Journal*, a leisurely, natural, often humorous account of the events of the trip. Again he effected familiarity with his subject matter by seeking direct contact with many aspects of Russian life.

After the beginning of the war, Steinbeck travelled a great deal, spending little time in California, and in 1950 he settled permanently in New York. The move is significant in two ways. It suggests that success was finally tempting him away from his earlier humility to the sophistication of urbanity. But more important, it isolated him from the materials with which he was most familiar, and out of which he had created his finest works. After *The Wayward Bus*, only two of his novels, *Sweet Thursday* and *East of Eden*, utilize the California materials, and their poor quality may be attributed in part to the distance he placed between himself and his subject matter.

In trying to universalize his biological views in the play-novelette, *Burning Bright*, Steinbeck abandoned any attempt to deal with what had been long familiar to him. The setting and characters and events have been universalized out of any sense of reality. Even the language, usually a mark of Steinbeck's realism, here appears as "a kind of incredible hash of realism, coined archaisms, and poetic rhetoric." (*WWJS*, p. 256) The fact that there is no trace of humour in the novel is indicative of
his lack of ease and assurance.

*East of Eden*, on which he worked intermittently for five years, is Steinbeck's most ambitious novel. That the work is generally viewed as a failure is due to his insufficient control over his divers materials. (*WWJS*, p. 263) Although he is familiar with the setting, and many of the characters are members of his own family, his writing, as Lisca points out, is often extremely awkward. (*WWJS*, pp. 269-271) Perhaps the awkwardness can be explained by the fact that Steinbeck, in this novel, moved away from his usual non-teleological interpretation of existence, replacing it with a moralistic attitude which mars the smoothness of the narrative. The resultant lack of ease may account for the surprisingly small amount of humour in a novel of such length, especially in view of the fact that it is a leisurely story of the past, rather than a fictional treatment of urgent, contemporary issues such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

*Sweet Thursday* is the last of Steinbeck's novels to deal with the familiar characters and setting of California. Despite the fact that it is a sequel to *Cannery Row* and even uses the same framework, it confirms his move away from non-teleological thinking. Here he offers nothing as a replacement. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of serious inter-chapters, which added such realism to *Cannery Row*, leaves *Sweet Thursday* nothing but a flimsy plot unfolding in a dream-like atmosphere. Not even the "common bonds of humanity," seen in the novel by Holman, (p. 19) nor the "expansive, the generous,
the aesthetic attitude," attributed by Metzger, (p. 116) save the novel artistically. Yet, although *Sweet Thursday* is a failure as a novel, its humour is largely successful. Steinbeck succeeds in his use of humour to objectify Mack and the boys although he is less successful in the case of Doc. The satire, in particular, is successful, especially that related to Joseph and Mary, Whitey No. 2 and Joe Elegant. (*WWJS*, p. 278) It can be argued that his familiarity with his material allowed Steinbeck ease with humour, where other factors marred the artistic quality of his work. It is interesting to note that *Sweet Thursday* is his only failure in which humour succeeds.

It is obvious, even from this short chronology, that Steinbeck's work was deteriorating. French sees the deterioration beginning with *The Pearl*, (p. 137) although Lisca is probably more accurate when he claims it began just after *The Wayward Bus*. (*WWJS*, p. 288) The decline is attributed to two major causes: the death of Ed Ricketts in 1948, and the move away from the familiar California setting of his best works. (*WWJS*, pp. 291, 289) It is probable that Ricketts' death accounts, at least partially, for Steinbeck's abandonment of his biological theories and that it deprived him, as French observes, of a "tutor and critic." (p. 161) French speculates that "if Ricketts were still influencing Steinbeck, he might work more carefully and be less pontifical." (p. 161) The move to New York brought "change of personal contacts--from plain people, bums, and *paisanos* to Broadway, Hollywood, and international celebrities." (*WWJS*, p. 289)
The effect of the loss of the old contacts on the quality of Steinbeck's humour is evident in the fact that, except for 
*Sweet Thursday*, there is very little successful humour in his fiction after *The Wayward Bus*.

Steinbeck reached the lowest point of his decline in the writing of *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*. It is his first major attempt at sophisticated, urban humour, and the result is disastrous. The quality of the humour is accurately evaluated by Lisca in his comment: "Here at last Steinbeck has come full circle, back to the topical satire of his juvenilia—the short stories and poems published...while he was an undergraduate, and the eight poems published in *The Monterey Beacon*." (WWJS, p. 286)

The novel stands as evidence of Steinbeck's dependence on familiarity of subject matter in order to produce either good writing or good humour. The satire in the novel is well directed, and his satire of American politics through a fabricated French situation is a clever device. But in his concentration on satire, Steinbeck has forfeited the richness of setting and characterization which gave his earlier satire its subtlety. It is unfortunate that the force of the satire is weakened by the blatant, adolescent tone.

Since 1941 Steinbeck has written a large number of short pieces. Of these, five are short stories in which there is little humour. The story of greatest interest is "How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank," for it is the basis of Ethan Hawley's contemplated bank robbery in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The
remaining short pieces are articles written, for the most part, after Steinbeck moved to New York.\textsuperscript{18} These articles, although condemned by some critics as mere "potboilers,"\textsuperscript{19} reveal two aspects of Steinbeck as a writer. While in some he treats trivial subjects, in many he is seriously concerned with contemporary issues of great urgency. The critics who condemn him for neglect of his art fail to recognize the humanistic impulse which motivates him to serious journalism, the impulse without which his finest works would not have been produced. The second aspect revealed by the articles relates to his use of humour. In most cases when he is not immediately involved with a critical situation, he treats his subjects through some form of humour. Since many of the serious articles are corrective in their intent, the humour often takes the form of satire. The fact that he falls easily into the humorous vein in so many articles suggests that his natural tendency is toward humour. It can be said that, in general, there is humour present in his writing unless he is immediately involved with an urgent question, or unless he curbs it for dramatic effect, as he does in many of the stories in \textit{The Long Valley}.

After more than a decade of decline, Steinbeck returned to the high quality of his best writing. \textit{The Winter of Our Discontent} "indicts money values and middle-class morality in a way reminiscent of the earlier Steinbeck."\textsuperscript{20} Although in an entirely new urban tone,\textsuperscript{21} the novel is written with the ease and assurance of the California works. The probable explanation is that Steinbeck
has finally become completely familiar with his new surroundings. The satire on American morality, presented through the entire process of Ethan's succumbing to temptation, is subtly handled. The humour of Ethan's character, however, is extremely poor, but Steinbeck is using poor humour intentionally, and with excellent results, to characterize his protagonist. The artistic success of the novel is attested to by the fact that Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature on its merits.22

Perhaps the greatest disappointment in Steinbeck's writing is his final work, Travels with Charley. The return to excellence promised in The Winter of Our Discontent is shattered by the "potboiling disappointment"23 of the travelogue. The two positive aspects of the book are that Steinbeck is still interested in finding first-hand material, and that he is writing with an ease and assurance reminiscent of his earlier works. The quality of the humour, however, is more comparable to that of Pippin, and his juvenilia, than to his better humorous works. This may be attributed to Steinbeck's decline of humility which is more evident in Charley than in any other work. Although there are still many passages of self-deprecation, such as "I was born lost," (p. 70) these are offset by a new note of pretentiousness in the passages about his cabin boat, Fayre Eleyne, (pp. 12-16) his impressive stock of liquor in Rocinante, (p. 25) and about himself: "I have always lived violently, drunk hugely, eaten too much or not at all....I've lifted, pulled, chopped, climbed, made love with joy and taken my hangovers as a consequence, not
as a punishment....My wife married a man." (p. 20) The humble man who, in 1935, wrote, "We've gone through too damn much trying to keep the work honest and in a state of improvement to let it slip now in consideration of a little miserable popularity," may have been predicting his own course as he continued, "It has ruined everyone I know."24

The chronological study of Steinbeck's works reveals a number of things about his humour. To a great extent, the quality of his writing depends on his familiarity with his materials. With familiarity comes an ease of expression which generally includes the use of humour. There is a direct relationship between the degree of familiarity and the quality of the humour. His inclination to humour in much of his non-fiction, where he is speaking in his own voice, reveals him to be an individual with a naturally humorous outlook. However, a basic duality in his reaction to incidents and conditions hinders him from being continually humorous. Although his natural outlook prompts him to treat general topics humorously, his strong sense of what is just demands that he treat urgent issues with severity, as he does in The Grapes of Wrath, In Dubious Battle, and in many articles. It is this duality which explains much of the oscillation between the serious and humorous in his work. It is this duality, also, which has prevented the formation of any pattern in the chronology of his works, for his reactions, generally, have been dependent on the degree of concern which provoked them.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Throughout his career, John Steinbeck has reflected many facets of the American scene. Beginning as a regionalist in the most southwestern part of the United States, he capitalized on the setting, characters, events and folklore of his immediate locale. Not only did he exploit the materials at hand but he infused his writing with a homely, natural humour indicative of the sphere of America he was representing. After his move to New York, the remoteness from his subject matter resulted in a decline in his artistry and in the quality of the humour in his fiction. Gradually, however, as he accustomed himself to his surroundings, he began to look to the new locale for material. That his utilization of immediate materials has improved his writing is evidenced in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, his first novel set in Eastern America. Although a new type of urban humour has appeared in his articles written in recent years, he has not yet been successful with it in an extended work.

Steinbeck, divided as he has been between California and New York, has experienced, in many ways, the most marked extremes in what is American. He has not only moved from west to east and from south to north, but he has left the rural for the urban, the simple for the sophisticated. More than that, celebrities and other moneyed people have replaced the ranchers, migrants and bums as his friends. His has been a reverse process of the expansion
of American civilization westward which carried with it, in its evolvement in literature, a parallel evolvement in humour. Were he able to embrace the new without relinquishing the old, his present outlook could encompass a wider range of American attitudes.

For there is no doubt that it is natural for Steinbeck to view his materials humorously. His non-fiction reveals this tendency. Where American humour moved away from the sophistication and the pretentiousness of British humour toward the simple, down-to-earth humour of the backwoods, Steinbeck began with the earthy humour of the West and moved toward the urban humour of the East. If his own humour has sunk to the level of that attributed to Ethan Hawley, then it is likely that there will be no return to his former performance. However, if he is able somehow to incorporate the kind of humour he writes in his non-fiction into a novel as powerfully mature as *The Winter of Our Discontent*, his humour will again play as integral a part in his fiction as it did in his former successes.

In the use of character, too, Steinbeck has reversed the direction of the process taken by American humour generally for he began with concern for the underdog and has moved, since going East, to sophisticated consideration of the Little Man. Although Steinbeck has dealt with characters within the American convention, he has not always dealt with them in a conventional way. For he has used the three main national characters—the Yankee, the backwoodsman, and the Negro—which evolved in American humour, but
has manipulated them in such a way that each serves to comment on, and expand, the position of the other two.

Because Steinbeck has experimented extensively in his writing, he has produced an appealing variety both in artistry and in humour. Perhaps the most rewarding effect his experimentation has had on his humour resulted from his concern for the underdog. By treating the Jim figures with a warm sympathy he evolved a tender kind of humour, finely balanced to avoid either pity or flippancy, a humour which communicates both the humility and the dignity of the subjects. His ability to create a humour that arises naturally out of his materials accounts for the excellence of the humour in his California novels. It is the same kind of humour found in much of the non-fiction, where the author is his most natural self. Again, if Steinbeck were able to encompass both the old and the new simultaneously, he could perhaps infuse his new urban humour with the best elements of his rural humour and therefore create a new variety. If his sophisticated humour were tempered with the humility and naturalness found in his non-fiction and in his earlier novels, he would perhaps be successful in creating a humour in keeping with his new interest in the Tom figure.

Just as Steinbeck's position, first as Californian and then as New Yorker, accounts for his duality in cultural climate, so the difference in his reaction to various issues reveals his duality in personal attitudes. He is naturally humorous and tends to treat even chronic ills with a militancy couched in humorous terms.
When his concern is with issues which are not crucial, he usually attempts to correct through satire. It is the strongest single element visible in his humour, and varies from the gentle mocking in *Tortilla Flat* to the sharp indictment of *The Wayward Bus* to the cold, almost humourless attacks in *The Pearl*. For the most part he is successful in his satire, except when he allows it to become too blatant, as he does in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*.

A writer seldom reaches full stature without impressing upon his audience certain characteristics within his craft which become his own trademark. Just as the terse, objective style denotes Hemingway's work, and the long, convoluted sentences identify Faulkner's style, so the way in which humour is used characterizes much of Steinbeck's work. Although his use of humour for characterization and for intensifying pathos are not particularly distinguishing traits, his use of short, harsh, serious events to avoid the unreality which often results from an uninterrupted use of humour has become recognizably his own. Even more characteristically Steinbeckian are the ways in which he uses it to personalize factual material. These uses of humour, combined with his objective style and his choice of unsophisticated subjects, are the recognizable characteristics of Steinbeck's work.

Since the success of Steinbeck's writing is so dependent on his geographic location, it may be said that he is truly a regionalist as far as his earlier works are concerned. Steinbeck, who found familiarity with his materials a necessity in order to gain ease in writing, faced the same problem in his creation of
humour. For the most part, there is a direct relationship between the quality of the humour and the quality of the work which contains it. For a man who naturally tends to humour, and who creates humour best when he is familiar with his setting, characters, and events it is natural to hope that he may create a great novel of the East, containing superb humour. Steinbeck, however, has always been an unpredictable writer. In view of his duality of reaction to various crises, and in view of his ability to familiarize himself with facts of urgent issues, it is just as justifiable to predict that his next novel will be a severe indictment of the treatment of the Negro in America, an issue for which he has already shown great concern in "Atque Vale" and *Travels with Charley*.

Although his tendency to experiment has caused him to treat a wide range of topics, "Steinbeck writes about America, which has always distinguished him from a great many other American writers."¹ And although he expresses himself often through his natural sense of humour, his writing pertains to the American scene in a way which indicates his concern as a humanist. With such concern it is understandable that he does not wish to be tagged as a humorist, for he is first of all a humanist—a humanist who utilizes his humour to voice his concern for humanity.
NOTES

Chapter One


4 James Woodress, "John Steinbeck: Hostage to Fortune," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LXIII (Summer, 1964), 395. The phases of Steinbeck's writing are based partially on Woodress's classification.

5 The stories are: "Fingers of Cloud," The Stanford Spectator, II (February, 1924), 149, 161-164; "Adventures in Arcademy," Ibid., II, (June, 1924), 279, 291. The poems are: "If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job: HAPPY BIRTHDAY!", "If John V. A. Weaver Had Written Keats' Sonnet in the American Language: ON LOOKING AT A NEW BOOK BY HAROLD BELL WRIGHT," "Study of a Very Feminine Obituary Editor," Stanford Lit, I (March, 1926), 94-95.

6 "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography," in Steinbeck and His Critics, eds. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque, N. M., 1957), p. 6. This collection will be cited henceforth as SHC.


12 From a letter written in 1934 to his agents, as quoted in WWJS, p. 76.


15 Writers in Crisis (Boston, 1941), p. 252f.


19 The first two parts of The Red Pony were published as short stories in 1933, the third in 1937. The novelette was separately published in a limited edition (699 copies) in 1937, then collected in The Long Valley in 1938. (WWJS, pp. 92f., 310)

20 As stated in Gannett, in SHC, p. 32.

21 As stated in Frederick Bracher, "Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," in SHC, p. 195.

22 As stated in Gannett, in SHC, p. 36.


24 As stated in WWJS, p. 198.

25 As stated in WWJS, p. 198.


30 "In the Land of Nod," The New Republic, CXXVII (October 6, 1952), 22f.


35 "If I Were King," Time, LXIX (April 15, 1957), 126.


41 Burns Singer, "New Novels," The Listener, LXV (June 29, 1961), 1145.

42 The Times Literary Supplement, July 7, 1961, p. 413.

43 Peter Harcourt, "Steinbeck's Fables," Time and Tide, XLII (June 22, 1961), 1031.


47 Nicholas Wollaston, "In Continents and Islands," The Spectator, CCIX (October 19, 1962), 604.


Chapter Two

1 Steinbeck was born February 27, 1902, in Salinas, California. His home was in California until 1942. (French, pp. 20, 26, 29)


7 Joel Chandler Harris, "Uncle Remus's Southern Negro Stories," in NAH, p. 505.


10 Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York, 1930), p. 91f.


13 The American (Boston, 1877), p. 42.


15 Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston, 1959).


18 Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (London, 1884). The early passage, "Tom...wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun," (p. 9) foreshadows Tom's later lack of consideration for Jim when he carries out elaborate plans for his escape rather than inform him that he has been set free. (pp. 348-409)

20 Life and Literature of the Southwest (Dallas, 1952), p. 89. Cited henceforth as Dobie.


26 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (Norfolk, Conn, 1953).

27 "Steinbeck is fond of the underdog," (Beach, in SHC, p. 87) "he has gone farther than any other American writer towards being the poet of our dispossessed," (Moore, p. 72) and he has shown "outraged compassion for the victims of chaotic forces." (French, p. 74)

28 Subsequent references to Steinbeck's published works will be made by abbreviated titles. The key to the titles and editions is given in Appendix I, p. 146.


30 "Dubious Battle in California," The Nation, CXLIII (September 12, 1936), p. 304.

31 John Steinbeck, "Discovering the People of Paris," Holiday, XX (August, 1956), p. 36.

32 See above, p. 28.

Chapter Three


2 "The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals," in CTP, p. 32.

3 "On Wit and Humour," in CTP, p. 17.
Chapter Four

1 See above, Chapter Three, p. 52.

2 e.g., Don Quixote and Sancho Panza; Tom Jones and Partridge.
According to Lisca, "The Leader of the People" was probably written around the time of *Tortilla Flat*, which was finished in 1933. (WWJS, p. 105)

TF, CR, ST, SRP.

See above, Chapter Three, p. 53.


"I Go Back to Ireland," *Collier's*, CXXXI (January 31, 1953), 49.


The Stanford Spectator, II (February, 1924), 164.

See above, Chapter Three, p. 56.


The Stanford Spectator, II (June, 1924), 279, 291.

Ibid., II (February, 1924), 149, 161-164.

From a letter by Steinbeck, as quoted by Lisca, WWJS, p. 173.


Loc. cit.


Ibid., p. 15.


*Saturday Review*, XXXVIII (October 8, 1955), 11.

"Conversation at Sag Harbor," *Holiday*, XXIX (March, 1961), 60.

"High Drama of Bold Thrust Through Ocean Floor," p. 111.
25 There is no doubt that Steinbeck was aware of the double irony in using the name Ethan Allen. Allen, the leader of the Vermont "Green Mountain Boys," is generally revered as one of America's great revolutionary heroes. The common attitude is indicated by Herman Melville's description: "Allen...had a person like the Belgian giants; mountain music in him like a Swiss; a heart plump as Coeur de Lion's....He was frank, bluff, companionable as a Pagan, convivial, a Roman, hearty as a harvest. His spirit was essentially Western." (Israel Potter (New York, 1963), p. 198). In actuality, Ethan Allen became dissatisfied with the revolutionary government and, despite his earlier loyalty, conspired with the British to make Vermont a British province. ("Allen, Ethan," Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 1, 1965, p. 642)

26 These include CG, TGU, DB, MM, LV, GW, P, WB, BB, WD, and uncollected short stories.

27 "Always Something to Do in Salinas," Holiday, XVII (June, 1955), 153, 156.


30 The critics who recognize that Steinbeck is not advocating primitivism are: Lisca, WWJS, p. 81; French, p. 23; Gibbs, in SHC, p. 96; Beach, in SHC, pp. 87-89. Woodburn 0. Ross calls Tortilla Flat primitivistic, but qualifies his statement by saying, "An important reservation is established by the very tone of the book. Steinbeck enters a kind of disclaimer by writing in a mock-heroic vein." ("John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," in SHC, p. 174). Carpenter also sees Steinbeck in sympathy with the primitivism of the paisanos, but goes on to say that he recognizes the need for "purposeful and responsible action." (SHC, p. 74f.)

31 Stanford Lit, I (March, 1926), 94f.

32 Mother of Pearl (London, 1924), p. 93.

33 See above, Chapter One, p. 17.

34 See above, p. 88.

35 See above, Chapter One, p. 13.

36 Saturday Review, XXXIX (March 31, 1956), 11.

38 "How to Tell Good Guys from Bad Guys," The Reporter, XII (March 10, 1955), 42-44.
42 "My War with the Ospreys," Holiday, XXI (March, 1957), 165.
43 "The Secret Weapon We Were Afraid to Use," Collier's, CXXXI (January 10, 1953), 9.

Chapter Five

1 Burgum, in SHC, p. 106; Rascoe, in SHC, p. 58; Holman, p. 20.
2 See above, Chapter One, p. 7f.
3 Holman, p. 20; Fontenrose, p. 127f.; French, p. 158; Watt, p. 101.
4 See above, Chapter Two, p. 38.
5 SC, pp. 20-22, 57, 70, 75f., 79.
7 "A Model T Named 'It,'" Ford Times, LXV (July, 1953), 36.
8 Ibid., p. 37f. This incident is also described in "Jalopies I Cursed and Loved," Holiday, XVI (July, 1954), 45.
9 e.g., Tex's hatred of dishwashing, p. 83; Sparky's instinct for making spaghetti on Thursdays and Sundays, p. 218; Sparky's accidental harpooning of a bat, p. 235f.
10 These theories include: non-teleological or "is" thinking, p. 135; the group functioning as a survival unit, which is related to his "group-man" theory, p. 240f.; the belief that ornamentation of a species leads to extinction, which he relates to the human race, p. 88.
11 See above, Chapter Four, p. 99.
12 See above, Chapter Four, p. 98.
Chapter Six

1 "Fingers of Cloud" and "Adventures in Arcademy."

2 "If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job" and "If John V. A. Weaver Had Written Keats' Sonnet in the American Language."

3 Lisca states that early in his career Steinbeck had written at least three novels which were not published, as well as numerous versions of both Cup of Gold and To a God Unknown. (SHC, p. 7, WWJS, p. 26)

4 See above, Chapter One, p. 5.

5 There is some humour in the passage in which the reputation of Jim's father is discussed: "he could lick five cops with his bare hands." The humour lies in the reversal of Jim's answer, "'I guess he could, but every time he went out he met six.'" (p. 8)

6 A short story first published in 1934. (WWJS, p. 92)

7 See above, Chapter Five, p. 111f.

8 IDB and GW.
Steinbeck completed the MS of MM in September, 1936. The articles were published in September and October of the same year. (WWJS, pp. 130, 312)

A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath, p. 52.

Ibid., p. 92.

From a letter by Steinbeck to his publishers, quoted in WWJS, p. 179.

French, p. 130. French argues that such passages as the one in which the curious man questions Doc about the girl's body on the reef (CR, p. 322) are vicious attacks on insensitivity.

See above, Chapter Four, p. 91.

Lisca, in SHC, p. 20.

Mizener, p. 22f.


The articles most pertinent to this study have been mentioned previously.

French, p. 30; Woodress, p. 386.

Woodress, p. 395.

Not only is the tone new to Steinbeck but also this is his first extended use of a first-person narrator. In WD Ethan Hawley narrates eighteen of the novel's twenty-two chapters. The short stories, "Johnny Bear" (LV, pp. 145-168) and "Breakfast," (LV, pp. 89-92) are told in the first person, as are parts of EE.

See above, Chapter One, p. 19.

Woodress, p. 397.

From a letter to his agents, as quoted in WWJS, p. 109.

Chapter Seven

APPENDIX I

Key to Abbreviated Titles

MD The Moon is Down, in The Short Novels, pp. 209-269.
MM Of Mice and Men, in The Short Novels, pp. 155-208.
P The Pearl, in The Short Novels, pp. 363-407.
RP The Red Pony, in The Short Novels, pp. 103-153.
TF Tortilla Flat, in The Short Novels, pp. 1-101.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS BY STEINBECK

Novels and Collections of Fiction


Cannery Row, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 271-361.


The Moon is Down, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 209-269.

Of Mice and Men, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 155-208.


The Pearl, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 363-407.


The Red Pony, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 103-153.


Short Fiction


"His Father," Reader's Digest, LV (September, 1949), 19-21.


"The Miracle of Tepayac," Collier's, CXXII (December 25, 1948), 22-23.


Verse


"If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job: HAPPY BIRTHDAY!", Stanford Lit, I (March, 1926), 94.

"If John V. A. Weaver Had Written Keats' Sonnet in the American Language: ON LOOKING AT A NEW BOOK BY HAROLD BELL WRIGHT," Stanford Lit, I (March, 1926), 94.


"Thoughts on Seeing a Stevedore," Monterey Beacon, I (January 26, 1935), 11.


Separately Published Non-Fiction


Film Scripts

Lifeboat. 1944.


Viva Zapata! 1950.

Articles

"Acceptance Speech for the Nobel Prize," Vogue, CXL I (March 1, 1963), 16.

"Always Something to Do in Salinas," Holiday, XVII (June, 1955), 58-59, 152-153, 156.


"Black Man's Ironic Burden," Negro History Bulletin, XXIV (April, 1961), 146, 156.

"Conversation at Sag Harbor," Holiday, XXIX (March, 1961), 60-61.
"D' for Dangerous," McCall's, LXXXV (October, 1957), 57, 82, 84.
"Discovering the People of Paris," Holiday, XX (August, 1956), 36.
"Dubious Battle in California," The Nation, CXLIII (September 12, 1936), 302-304.
"How to Tell Good Guys from Bad Guys," The Reporter, XII (March 10, 1955), 42-44.
"I Go Back to Ireland," Collier's, CXXXI (January 31, 1953), 48-50.
"Miracle Island of Paris," Holiday, XIX (February, 1956), 43.
"My War with the Ospreys," Holiday, XXI (March, 1957), 72-73, 163-165.
"Our Rigged Morality," Coronet, XLVII (March, 1960), 144-147. (Includes answer from Adlai Stevenson.)


"A Primer on the 30's," Esquire, LIII (June, 1960), 85-93.


"The Secret Weapon We Were Afraid to Use," Collier's, CXXXI (January 10, 1953), 9-13.


"The Soul and Guts of France," Collier's, CXXX (August 30, 1952), 26ff.

"The Spivacks Beat the Odds," Reader's Digest, LXXIII (October, 1958), 138-139.


"What Is the Real Paris?" Holiday, XVIII (December, 1955), 94.

"Yank in Europe," Holiday, XIX (January, 1956), 25.

WORKS ABOUT STEINBECK

Separate Publications


Ackerley, J.R. "Once There Was a War, by John Steinbeck," The Listener, (June 16, 1960), 1067.


Cousins, Norman. "Who are the Real People?" Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (March 17, 1945), 14.


"If I Were King," Time, LXIX (April 15, 1957), 126.


"Looking After Number One," The Times Literary Supplement, July 7, 1961, p. 413.


"Old Steinbeck," Newsweek, LVII (June 26, 1961), 96.


Rothman, Nathan L. "A Small Miracle," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII (December 30, 1944), 5.


WORKS ON HUMOUR


Lynn, Kenneth S. *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*. Boston, 1959.


GENERAL WORKS CONSULTED FOR DEFINITIONS OF HUMOUR


**OTHER WORKS CONSULTED**


Benson, Ivan. *Mark Twain's Western Years*. Stanford University, 1938.


