

John Steinbeck (1902-1968)



LIFE

John Ernst Steinbeck was a distinguished American writer, born in Salinas, California. He was the third child in the family, with two elder sisters. His mother was a schoolteacher, and his father managed a flour mill. Throughout his childhood, Steinbeck spent much of his summer in the family cottage at Pacific Grove.

A bright and promising student, Steinbeck was a passionate reader and story writer. He attended Stanford University for some time, but left it without a degree. In the summer of 1923 he enrolled at the Hopkins Marine Station for a course in general zoology, which would provide him with a holistic view of nature and the universe, a theme that he would later explore throughout most of his writing.

In the days of his writing apprenticeship, Steinbeck did a number of odd jobs such as journalist, construction worker or caretaker for the Bingham estate at Lake Tahoe. He drew his inspiration for his novels not only from the experience gained doing such jobs, but also from his acquaintance with labor organizers (e.g., *In Dubious Battle*) and minute field research (e.g., *The Grapes of Wrath*). In the summer

of 1936, while investigating the field conditions in the south, he met Thomas Collins, the manager of the Arvin Sanitary Camp, California, where migrants were temporarily provided humane and clean living conditions (the model for the government camp in *Grapes*). Collins provided Steinbeck with first-hand information about the migrant experience.

Steinbeck was first married to Carol Henning, an accomplished editor who gave him astute editorial advice throughout his most productive period in the 1930s, and who also suggested the title for his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was at that time that the United States and much of the world entered the Great Depression, and that Steinbeck developed a stronger and more realistic writing voice, and became one of the finest observers of the devastating effects of the Depression on American society and families.

Tortilla Flat was the first novel that brought him fame and commercial success. Paramount also bought the movie rights for \$4,000, which was a large sum in the middle of the Great Depression. *In Dubious Battle*, based on an unpublished essay ('Argument of Phalanx'), established Steinbeck's reputation as a serious writer. While working on the manuscript for *Of Mice and Men*, his puppy destroyed the first half of the only copy of the manuscript, which made Steinbeck comment that the dog might have been acting as a critic. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck experimented with form, and created the 'play-novelette', which was also adapted for Broadway and the big screen.

The immense pressure of fame and the short amount of time he allocated to his 'great book', *The Grapes of Wrath*, took its toll on the author's mental and physical health. The novel became the number one bestseller in 1939. While the screen rights sold for a large sum of money, the book was also banned in places.

Steinbeck traveled restlessly, and embarked upon several projects. He was directly involved in the approval process of the film versions of *The Grapes of Wrath* (directed by John Ford) and *Of Mice and Men* (directed by Lewis Milestone). In Hollywood he began an on-and-off affair with Gwyndolyn Conger, the woman who would become his second wife. During his separation from Carol, Steinbeck lived with his friend Ed Ricketts in his lab on Cannery Row. He was particularly interested in scientific work, and understanding the world through a more thorough knowledge of biology, chemistry, and physics.

When he won the Pulitzer Prize for *Grapes* in 1941, he gave the money to his struggling writer friend, Ritchie Lovejoy. During the same year Steinbeck described himself as suffering from 'restlessness' while working sporadically on the *Sea of Cortez* manuscript (co-authored with Ricketts) and other projects. Two years later he married Gwyndolyn with whom he had two sons.

In the summer of 1943 he worked as a war correspondent for the *Herald Tribune*, and traveled to the front in North Africa and Italy. He returned to New York in October, sick of the war, and began the manuscript for *Cannery Row*, a book which he deliberately chose not to be about the war.

Steinbeck worked with Jack Wagner on the film version of *The Pearl* and then finished the manuscript for *The Wayward Bus*. He received an Academy Award nomination for his script-writing for *A Medal for Benny*, directed by Irving Pichel. In 1948 the author went back to Monterey to do background research for what would become his second 'big book', *East of Eden*.

Separating from his second wife, and severely shaken by the sudden death of his friend, Ricketts, Steinbeck embarked on a project with Elia Kazan for the screenplay of *Viva Zapata!* in Mexico. For some time afterwards, he retired to the Pacific Grove cottage, suffering from depression. In 1949 Steinbeck was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the film version of *The Red Pony*, directed by Lewis Milestone, with a screenplay by Steinbeck, was released. He met Elaine Scott, the woman who would become his third wife a year later.

In 1952, *East of Eden* was published and Steinbeck dedicated the novel to his editor, Pascal Covici. Even though there were mixed reviews of the novel, it had become a bestseller by the end of the year. In 1955 the film version of *East of Eden*, directed by Elia Kazan and starring James Dean, was a hit.

In the late 50s he went to England for more extensive research on his long-life interest in *Morte d'Arthur*. It was around the same time that he became deeply concerned about the decay of the American morality,

especially with the young generation, and drafted his last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961).

On October 25th 1962, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Despite his waning health, at the request of President Kennedy, Steinbeck traveled on an exhausting two-month cultural exchange trip to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In 1964, Thomas H. Guinzburg, the head of Viking, brought a collection of photographs taken from around the country and proposed Steinbeck to write captions for a picture book, *America and Americans*.

Steinbeck died in 1968 after suffering a series of strokes and a heart attack all throughout the year.

LEGACY

John Steinbeck's unique ability to construct memorable characters and render the spirit of the twentieth-century America through detailed depictions of rural California, the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, has made his name among the classics not only in American but also world literature. Steinbeck's incredibly rich literary legacy resides in the wide range of interests he explores in his works, including marine biology, social problems, philosophical and psychological aspects related to human behavior (e.g. the phalanx theory) and history.

Even though he was criticized for his socialist views and opposition to American capitalist values, and even accused of sympathizing with Communists, best sellers such as *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*, and later on *East of Eden*, remain part of the American literary canon.

Irrespective of the controversies around *The Grapes of Wrath*, the novel earned Steinbeck the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1939. It was during the same year that The American Booksellers Association named it their favorite fiction book. All these novels have also been adapted to the big screen, and enjoyed resounding success.

Steinbeck was also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Steinbeck's remarkable contribution to the field of literature is fully acclaimed through the Nobel Prize in Literature.

PUBLICATIONS

- 1927 – *Cup of Gold* (historical fiction)
- 1932 – *The Pastures of Heaven* (twelve interconnected stories)
- 1933 – *To a God Unknown*
- 1935 – *Tortilla Flat*
- 1936 – *In Dubious Battle*
- 1937 – *Of Mice and Men* (play-novelle)
- 1937 – *The Red Pony* (episodic novel appearing in magazines between 1933 and 1936)
- 1938 – *The Long Valley* (a collection of twelve short stories)
- 1939 – *The Grapes of Wrath*
- 1942 – *The Moon Is Down*
- 1942 – *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team* (nonfiction)
- 1945 – *Cannery Row*
- 1947 – *The Wayward Bus*
- 1947 – *The Pearl*
- 1948 – *A Russian Journal* (travel report)
- 1950 – *Burning Bright*
- 1951 – *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (non-fiction)
- 1952 – *East of Eden*
- 1954 – *Sweet Thursday*
- 1957 – *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (A political satire)
- 1958 – *Once There Was A War* (collection of articles)
- 1961 – *The Winter of Our Discontent* (last novel)
- 1962 – *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (A travelogue)
- 1966 – *America and Americans* (collection of articles)
- 1969 – *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* (series of letters written by Steinbeck to his editor)
- 1975 - *Viva Zapata!* (screenplay)

1976 – *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (unfinished work)

1989 – *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath* (personal journal)

THEMES

SOCIETY

Capitalism

Steinbeck was deeply preoccupied with the negative impact that capitalism had on Americans, especially the ones who were deprived of social and financial privileges, and whom the Depression placed at the mercy of the rich landowners or banks. Steinbeck's sympathetic presentation of workers' desperately striving for some sort of dignity and fairer treatment by the employers brought him some critical backlash and even accusations that he was a supporter of communist ideals.

Tortilla Flat The fictional town of Tortilla Flat stands for an ideal world that is 'clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business', with 'nothing that can be stolen, exploited, or mortgaged'. Danny's worrying about how an inheritance may change his life for the worse hints at the fact that property, social conventions and a materialistic view of life lead to human beings' alienation and loss of their authentic self. As Danny comes to realize, property ownership has taken away his joy of living and brought about a constant sense of burden and a monotonous existence.

In Dubious Battle The conflict between the capitalist and socialist political ideologies is reflected in the often blood-soaked clashes between the workers and 'the vigilantes' and the police force. We also see that conflict in the characters' beliefs. Mac's actions, for example, reflect the Party's politics. Whenever London or Jim tells him that the fight between the strikers and authorities will inflict heavy casualties on innocent people, Mac dismisses their warnings on the grounds that the cause is what matters most. In his opinion, the capitalist system is 'the beast' assaulting 'the noble Party'. When London asks him if he is a radical 'red', Mac replies that radicalism is a matter of perspective. As he explains, the power in the valley belongs to a few people who would define any form of protest as radical and would do everything to maintain their wealth. As for 'a working stiff' like London, Mac goes on to argue, the 'reds' represent an opportunity to live a decent life, 'like a man, and not like a pig'. Conversely, from the rich owners' perspective, the strike is a radical action. Bolter describes it as an attack on 'American ideals'.

Grapes of Wrath Steinbeck criticizes the inhumane capitalist system that has forced families like the Joads into homelessness, unemployment and hunger. The crisis deepens even more as the handbills sent out all over the country deceptively bring more workers than needed in one place, which owners turn to their advantage by cutting the wages mercilessly: 'you take it or leave it'. The extremely unbalanced situation of property ownership becomes evident since 'all the time the farms grew larger and the owners fewer'.

Cannery Row Capitalism and its concern with the material and commercial aspects of life is an underlying theme in the novel. As Doc views Mack and his group of vagabond friends, they are 'the true philosophers' and survivors because they are 'relaxed' in a time 'when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness'. Indeed, Mack and his boys 'avoid the trap' of being 'eaten by financial bitterness' because 'they were not mercantile men'. They even get mildly irritated when Lee takes them 'for an economic ride or perhaps hop' and calculates how much their food and drinks cost.

Poverty

The 1930s was one of the worst socio-economic periods in the history of America, with the Great Depression affecting all walks of life, especially ordinary families that found themselves in a desperate struggle to survive as a result of the economic collapse and unprecedented unemployment rate. A generalized phenomenon at the time, poverty comes under close scrutiny in Steinbeck's novels. The

author explores how poverty impacts the human psyche and moral values, driving the individual to antisocial behavior and even extreme gestures such as killing and suicide.

Tortilla Flat Poverty impacts the protagonists' lives from a material and moral perspective. Firstly, it is linked to their precarious material situation. With the exception of the Pirate, they are homeless and sleep in the woods before they all get together in Danny's house. Secondly, poverty deeply affects their morality. They would rather steal or wait for some pity leftovers from the restaurants than work. For the six friends, in particular Danny and Pilon, poverty also means freedom from financial concerns and social conventions. For example, once Danny becomes an heir, he cannot enjoy his newly acquired social status since he feels overwhelmed with 'the worry of property'. Poverty may also be associated with some of the characters' very simple minds and inability to judge things properly. For example, Pirate is described as a man 'with no brain' whereas Mrs. Teresina Cortez is said to be 'a mildly puzzled woman'.

In Dubious Battle Poverty is a trigger for the characters' decision-making and belligerent action. The story events revolve around the time of the Great Depression, and poverty deeply affects all aspects of family and community life on both personal and social levels. It is the cause that underlies the fighting on both sides of the barricade: on the one side, the strikers want better wages and living/ working conditions, while, on the other side, the landowners are mainly interested in keeping their profits up. For example, Jim recollects the constant 'fighting something – hunger mostly' at home, whereas in Mac's view, the Torgas Valley strikers' protest is actually 'a revolution against hunger and cold'.

The Grapes of Wrath Poverty is described as a consequence of the severely drought-stricken Oklahoma that forced the locals to leave their land and seek a better life in rich California. The Joads' desperate struggle to stick together as a family despite all the financial difficulties and obstacles they encounter on their way to California gives a perceptive insight into the harsh reality of many American families at the time. Steinbeck's humane approach to this particular theme subtly hints at the vital importance that principles such as solidarity, sympathy and kindness play in maintaining the human spirit. In contrast to the rich Californians' fear of and discrimination against the 'Okies', poverty gains a symbolical value, becoming synonymous with dehumanization on both sides (the poor and the rich). As a result, the human spirit finds itself at great peril in a society ruled by greed, intolerance and violence.

Nature

Nature is a major theme in Steinbeck's novels. The ample poetic descriptions of the natural world provide vivid word imagery. Nature emerges as home (shelter) and a place of nurturing (a vital source of food), but also as a destructive force, with devastating consequences for itself (droughts, dry lands) and humans (mass migration). In Steinbeck's novels, nature wields great influence over the characters' emotions, thoughts, and even destiny. The naturalistic passages interspersed with those telling the characters' story help construct the larger picture of the critical situation in which individuals find themselves.

To A God Unknown The first part of the novel presents both man and nature in their glory. The enclosed Valley of Our Lady in central California represents the microcosm in which the characters' lives unfold with both joyful and dramatic moments. The rapport between nature and characters is gradually thrown off balance when the severe drought years strike the valley again. Joseph Wayne, the main protagonist slits his wrists on the mossy rock, as a form of self-sacrifice meant to make rain come again and revive his dying land.

Tortilla Flat Nature acts as a shelter and refuge for Danny Alvarez and his group of vagabond friends. They often hang out together, eat and sleep in the pine woods near Tortilla Flat, a poor district above the town of Monterey, California. The sublime beauty of the forest of tall dark pine trees stands in stark contrast to the impoverished area of Tortilla Flat and its residents. For the Pirate, for example, the pine forest serves as a source of income for the pitch wood he sells on the streets of Monterey. Moreover, the forest gains a sacred value since it is where the Pirate has a vision of Saint Francis. After Danny's death, his friends leave his burning house behind, and walk slowly away. Their return to their previous lifestyle conveys a view of nature as the only place where bliss and freedom from 'the transitory quality of earthly property' can be achieved.

The Grapes of Wrath Steinbeck's masterpiece is also considered one of his most 'ecological' novels, documenting a very dark period in the American history. Apart from the desperate plight of migrant workers in California during The Great Depression, the narrative closely follows the devastating Dust Bowl storms in the south, which left thousands of families homeless and in dire need for work in order to survive. The marked contrast between drought-stricken and dusty Oklahoma and richly green California illustrates the disastrous impact of manmade factors (federal land policies, settlers' inexperience with the ecology of the area, and intensive farming) on the climate as well as people's lives.

RELATIONSHIPS

Friendship

Although friendship is rather some sort of unspoken relationship between characters, it is the invisible thread that joins their paths together at least for some time and motivates them to take action. The characters' inability to refer to their friendships as such and engage with one another on an emotional level points to the fact that the Great Depression years and capitalism had damaging effects not only on the economy of the country but also on the people's spirit and ability to form meaningful and affectionate relationship with others.

Tortilla Flat The bond between the protagonists is quite twisted, and based on their shared vested interest in wine. Pilon constantly seeks to benefit from his friends' credulity and invokes friendship whenever convenient to him: when, for example, Danny inherits the house, or when he convinces the Pirate to move in with them. Big Joe, for his part, considers Pilon as 'one who takes care of his friends', and who makes sure that 'even when they sleep he is alert to see that no harm comes to them'. The Pirate represents the epitome of trust and friendship as he hands his money to his friends. His bag of money becomes 'the symbolic center of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved'.

Of Mice and Men The relationship between George and Lennie is quite untypical, as some other characters also notice. Having taken the responsibility of care from Lennie's late aunt, George often loses his temper over his friend's reckless behavior, caused by his cognitive impairment. However, in spite of his rough attitude towards Lennie, and frustration with his constant killings of soft little creatures and moments of forgetfulness that require frequent repetitions of instructions, George appears to have developed willy-nilly some kind of affection for his companion. There is a mixture of pity and fondness in George's extreme gesture to take his friend's life at the end of the story as a way to spare him the violent death at Curley's and his men's hands or the lifetime lock-up in a cage. Lennie, on the other hand, represents the genuine side of friendship as he completely entrusts his life and decisions to George.

The Grapes of Wrath The novel explores how friendship can dramatically change an individual's perspective and course of life through the relationship that Tom develops with Casy, once he has introduced him to his family, and they set for California together. The scene when a contractor and the deputy sheriff arrive at the camp looking for workers illustrates the friendship between the two men. The deputy wants to arrest Floyd, one of the workers whom they take for a 'red' agitator, but Tom and Casy intervene, and Floyd escapes. Casy urges Tom to go away to avoid being arrested for breaking parole, and takes all the blame and gets arrested. Later on, the two friends are caught up in an ambush that results in Casy's death and Tom's killing his friend's murderer. Tom hides away for a while, but then, inspired by Casy's sacrifice and commitment to the striking actions, he decides to leave his family and join the strikers' cause.

Cannery Row Friendship motivates many of the characters' actions in the story. Mack and his boys come along together as friends due to their shared social situation ('no families') and view of life ('no ambitions beyond food, drink and contentment'). Then their entire plot to organize a surprise party for Doc stems from the affectionate respect and friendship they feel for him. Mack's actions clearly show his 'good will and good fellowship and a desire' to make Doc happy. He even offers to collect frogs just because it 'means a lot to Doc'. Lee Chong and Dora are also fond of Doc. Lee agrees to go along with Mack's various requests while carrying out his secret party plan whereas Dora comes to Doc's aid during the flu

epidemic. The unusual connection between these characters is indicative of the power of friendship to go beyond social, racial and professional differences.

Family

Steinbeck's representation of the American family does not conform to stereotypes popular at the time. The roles are reversed since the head of the family is unable to provide support for the other members and make the right decisions; it is instead a strong woman who takes the entire responsibility to ensure the family's wellbeing. Steinbeck's concept of family is crucial for the individuals' survival especially during desperate times such as those described in the novels because it provides the characters with comfort and strength not to lose hope of a better life.

To A God Unknown Steinbeck portrays the patriarch of the family as absorbed in chasing an impossible dream, which makes him weak and unable to solve the problems of the family. Although Joseph is perceived by everyone around him as a strong man, his actions and obsessive pursuit of his ambition result in his family's disintegration. Lacking the wisdom, leadership spirit and the ability to reach a compromise in conflict situations, Joseph fails to keep his family united. By contrast, his wife, Elizabeth, and his sister-in-law, Rama, largely contribute to the successful functioning of the family. After Elizabeth's sudden death, Joseph cannot find the strength to save either himself or the rest of the family. In the end, Rama is the one who looks after the family.

Grapes of Wrath The Joads' efforts to 'stick together' reflect the essential role that the family plays in the survival of the individual, especially in the context of the natural disaster in their homeland Oklahoma, which has caused their uprooting. Throughout the story Ma's actions are aimed at keeping 'the family unbroke' because that is all they have got left. The Joad family comes forth as a 'unit', and Ma, in particular, draws her strength from her unshakable belief in its invaluable worth. Casy, for example, knows that there is a 'government of families' and that a family should be held in utmost respect by the others.

PSYCHOLOGY

Loneliness

There is a sense of loneliness that pervades the narrative in most of Steinbeck's novels and aims to heighten the gloomy atmosphere of the unsettled and difficult times of the Depression years. Steinbeck's protagonists often come across as individuals who, despite the circumstantial friendships they may have developed with the other characters, appear all alone in their inner turmoil and personal failure to succeed in a capitalist society that seems to value materialist possessions and money more than human beings.

Tortilla Flat Loneliness is deeply ingrained in the six *paisanos*' lives. Despite their occasional wine drinking encounters, they are solitary beings aimlessly roaming the streets. Only Danny's inheritance occasions their coming together for a while. At the end of the story, Danny can no longer tackle his feeling lonely 'under the weight of the house' and 'the responsibility to his friends' and falls into depression. At the party that Danny's friends and the Tortilla Flat people organize to cheer him up, he drinks heavily and attacks those present there with a table leg, shouting: 'Am I alone in the world? Will no one fight me?' Once Danny dies, the friends return to their lonely lives.

Of Mice and Men Loneliness pervades the characters' spirit and life in this novel. The name of the valley, 'Soledad' where most of the plot unfolds, is the Spanish word for 'solitude'. On the story level, the protagonists chat around a card game of *solitaire* (>*solitarius*, the Latin word for 'alone'). Although the protagonists share the bunkhouse, they appear isolated from one another. George remarks that ranch workers like them 'are the loneliest guys in the world'. However, George sometimes wishes he could travel alone as he claims that 'loneliness' can be a 'swell time' without the responsibility of looking after Lennie. Candy's physical incapacity caused by old age and injury also isolates him in a constant state of fear that he will become a disposable burden. Beneath the self-confidence Curley's wife displays, she feels lonely as she confides to Lennie. Crooks is another character whose life is marked by solitude and

isolation because of his race. He lives alone in the barn because the others have refused to share the bunkhouse with a black person.

Cannery Row Both nature and the residents of Cannery Row are affected by a deep sense of loneliness. Nature is referred to as 'a lonely countryside', 'the desolate cold aloneness of the landscape', or 'the lonely sky'. All the characters appear to be lonesome even when together with others. Doc is the protagonist who embodies loneliness *per se*. Despite the fact that everyone in Cannery Row is highly respectful and fond of him, he is a 'lonely and a set-apart man' and seems 'alone even when he is in a group'. Mac senses 'a dreadful feeling loneliness' when he looks down on Doc's laboratory.

Disability

Steinbeck drew his inspiration from his personal experience and encounters not only with itinerants and migrant workers at his father's company, but also with people with mental disabilities, like the character of Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. He said in an interview for the *New York Times* in 1937: 'Lennie was a real person. He's in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman'. He explores the theme of disability in a sympathetic manner, and points to such individuals' doomed fate in a society that marginalizes and treats them as pariahs.

Tortilla Flat The character of the Pirate is the epitome of innocence. He is described as a man 'with no brain', which makes him an easy target for Pilon and his friends. Therefore, when they pay him a visit to convince him to move in with them, claiming that they want to take care of him and that they are worried about him, the Pirate has no suspicion of their real intentions of laying hands on his hidden savings. He even feels overwhelmed when they tell him that he can take his dogs with him that he 'pleadingly' asks them to go away as he will join them the next day. He entrusts all his savings with his friends, with 'tears of happiness in his eyes' because he 'has proved his love' for them in this way.

Of Mice and Men In an increasingly industrialized society, individuals like Lennie, Candy and Crooks do not fit in. Disability takes a mental form with the character of Lennie, and a physical form with Candy (work accident) and Crook ('cripple'). Disability is shown no sympathy and treated as inconvenience. As for physical incapacity, Carlson's cold-blooded execution of Candy's old dog and Candy's own fear of sharing his dog's fate when he is 'no good to himself nor nobody else' are reflective of the then-attitude towards disability in society. Although Candy has lost his right hand while working on the ranch, his future is uncertain.

Cannery Row Frankie's innocence remains intact even though he is a victim of constant abuse. As it turns out, it is, in fact, his cognitive disability that makes him dismissive of it. He is not welcomed at school because of his learning disability and lack of coordination. Because Doc treats him kindly, Frankie develops some kind of obsession for him. His only desire is to 'be of great help' to Doc. When Frankie hears about Doc's birthday party, he steals a clock and a bronze statue to give them as presents to Doc. He gets arrested, and, when Doc comes to get Frankie paroled to him, the chief doubts that the judge will do that, given Frankie's mental report.

CHARACTERS

1. Matriarchal

Female characters are quite underrepresented in John Steinbeck's novels. Their names and deeds are brought into discussion by the male characters, mainly in derogatory terms. Apart from those of low morals, however, there are also the dedicated matriarchal heroines whose strength and resilience help their family overcome the life-and-death situations when the male heads of the family fail to do so.

Rama In *To a God Unknown*, Rama is the female leader of the Wayne family. Her motherly attitude towards children, weak people like Benjy and inexperienced ones like Elizabeth highlights her authority and sense of responsibility. She also instinctively knows how to handle strong people like Joseph or 'animal-like' ones like her husband, Thomas. The most illustrative moment of her representing the matriarchal figure of the Wayne family is when she and Thomas leave the farm. During her final conversation with Joseph, she realizes his manic delusion and thoughtlessness about the fate of the family. She feels the urge to 'hurry away' from the 'poor lonely man' that Joseph has become. On the morning of their departure, Rama organizes everything, feeds the children and makes sure that they are in a 'secure seat on top of the load'. With Thomas by her side, Rama is the one who 'puts her foot out on the brake' and drives the wagon away in order to save her family from an imminent disaster.

Ma Accustomed to hardships, Ma in *The Grapes of Wrath* is the pillar of strength, a 'goddess'-like head of the family, who manages to maintain stability and hope even at the most desperate times. She seems 'to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken'. Her love for the family is so 'great' that she is capable of spending the whole night next to Grandma's dead body and saying nothing about it lest the family's crossing the border might have been delayed. The entire family respects her 'faultless judgment', and there is an unspoken awareness that 'if she swayed the family shock, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall'. She is undoubtedly 'the power' and takes firm control of the situation when things go awry.

2. Obsessed

Some of Steinbeck's characters display an obsessive behavior, which adds to the dramatic effect of the narrative on the whole. They pursue their dream obsessively, which eventually either leads to their self-destruction or ruins others' lives.

Joseph In *To a God Unknown*, Joseph has a compulsive relation with his land. He constantly checks the good state of his homestead, and ignores any warnings and stories about the past dry years. Joseph faithfully follows his dream and continues to perform his rituals at all costs. His goal of creating a prosperous farm alone keeps him alert day and night. Joseph displays the same single-minded commitment when it comes to his beliefs about what the oak tree represents. Whenever he finds himself in need of advice, he talks to the tree, and performs pagan rituals. His extreme obsessive behavior worsens as the drought takes over all the land, except for the rock in the pine forest. As he believes the mossy rock is the 'heart' of his land, he carries water to keep it 'dripping with moisture' every morning and evening. When the stream near the rock dries up, he sacrifices a starving calf. As the rain still does not come, he uses a knife to open 'the vessels of his wrist' and water the rock with his own blood. In his final moments, Joseph's thoughts go to his land yet again.

Lennie In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie is obsessed with soft things, and touching them gives him great joy. When, for example, the mouse and later on the puppy he pets die at his 'huge paws', Lennie gets frustrated with the animals for being 'too little' rather than with his rough handling of them. Lennie's other obsession is the little ranch dream he shares with George. He keeps asking George to retell him the story of their dream house and the rabbits he will get to pet. Not only is he 'entranced' each time he hears the story, but he also finds comfort and bliss at the prospect.

Mac In *In Dubious Battle* Mac often shows little concern for the human casualties and property destruction that his plans in the Torgas Valley generates. Obsessed with the cause, Mac views the incident of old Anderson's barn being set on fire as yet another opportunity to boost the strikers' morale and show them how far the 'vigilantes' can go unless they remain united. Mac's blind faith in the cause he claims he fights for makes him completely dismiss the dramatic consequences of the strike on people's

lives when the sheriff comes to announce that the police will intervene in force unless they leave Anderson's property by daylight. London is afraid that a lot of innocent people will get shot, but Mac irrationally insists on mobilizing the men despite the fact that they have to fight the armed forces with their bare hands.

3. Strong-minded

Steinbeck created some memorable male but also female characters who show great determination and calmness in critical moments and who are not afraid to make crucial decisions for the safety of their family or friends.

Rama In *To a God Unknown*, Rama has a robust physique, as well as a strong and independent character. Her efficient way of running the household gains her a position of female authority in the Wayne family. Her strength mostly resides in her non-emotional response to distressful situations. For example, on the night that Benjy gets killed, Rama takes charge of Elizabeth and keeps her away from the scene. Elizabeth starts crying, but Rama urges her to stop since there is no point in crying over a man she has never met before. As readers come to find out in a later conversation between the two women, Rama once comforted Benjy. However, Rama shows no moment of weakness upon his death. She helps Elizabeth settle in and leads the way through the house with confidence and calmness as if nothing had happened.

George The final scene in *Of Mice and Men* reveals George's coldest side but, at the same time, his strength of character as he pulls the trigger and kills Lennie. George goes to the brush with the plan of shooting Lennie to spare him a terrible death by Curley and his men or lifetime imprisonment in a cage. George calms Lennie down by reminding him of their dream ranch where they will stay together the rest of their lives, which makes Lennie 'giggle with happiness'. As soon as he hears Curley and his men approaching, George finds the strength to control his shaking hand and shoot Lennie dead.

Jim Growing up in an extremely violent environment, Jim, one of the main protagonists in *In Dubious Battle*, is determined to support the cause no matter the consequences. After the teenage prisoner beating scene, Mac acknowledges that he has been terrified by his mentee's lack of sympathy and inhuman 'cold thought': 'You're hard-boiled. You just looked'. Jim calmly responds that 'sympathy is as bad as fear'. In order to be able to remain faithful to the cause, he depersonalizes the young prisoner, saying that he is not 'a scared kid', but 'a danger to the cause'. He reassures Mac that he just did 'a job' that involved 'no hate, no feeling'.

Ma Ma's strength of character emerges on numerous occasions in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Perhaps one of the most illustrative moments of her resilience and strong-mindedness is when the Joads reach the lowest point of their suffering at the end of the story. Everyone's spirits are 'damp' because of the endless days of rain that has left them out of work, close to starvation, and without a proper place to live. One morning, Ma suddenly announces to Pa that they have to move 'to higher ground'. When Pa 'weakly' opposes the idea, she reacts 'savagely': 'You're coming' or 'you ain't comin', but I'm takin' Rosasharn and the little fellows out of here'. She even finds the strength to smile in an understanding way when Al decides to stay behind with his girlfriend, Aggie. This clearly shows her dogged determination to save what is left of her family from an imminent disaster even though there is no certainty about the future either.

4. Cunning

Several characters, especially homeless and petty criminals, share a common trait, i.e. shrewdness. They hardly ever hesitate when it comes to turning a good opportunity to their advantage even if that means cheating, lying, stealing or using manipulative language.

Pilon In *Tortilla Flat*, Pilon shows no qualms when he uses veiled stories to subtly convince his friends to do what he wants them to. When he meets Danny right after the inheritance news, he tells him the story of 'a man who owned two whorehouses' to conveniently remind him of his own property. Pilon insinuates that now that Danny is rich he will forget about his old friends. Danny feels offended and tells Pilon that he can stay in one of his houses. He acts in a similar manner when, after some time watching the Pirate's

daily routine, he calculates how much money he must have saved since he has never been seen spending any. Convinced that the Pirate has hidden his money, he talks the other friends into his 'groundwork of pity' and invites the Pirate to go live with his 'friends'.

Mac Mac in *In Dubious Battle* seizes each opportunity to turn things in favor of the Party's cause. As soon as he arrives in the Torgas Valley, he proves to be a shrewd judge of character and acts accordingly. For example, sensing that London is the leader of the group, Mac claims that he has medical training and assists his daughter-in-law in giving birth in order to gain his trust. Later, he takes advantage of Al's sympathy with the party to get close to his father, old Anderson, whose property he has in mind for setting the camp. In his speeches to the strikers he unscrupulously refers to his friends' death with the covert aim of heartening them to continue the protest.

Mack In *Cannery Row*, the encounter with the Captain episode clearly illustrates Mack's native ability to judge a character and a situation so as to benefit him. Through his humble and solicitous attitude, cunning flattery and story about how their frogs will help the cancer research, he impresses an initially belligerent Captain to such an extent that he invites them over to his place for the frog hunt and drinks. After they have collected the frogs and the host falls asleep heavily drunk, Mack tells the boys that the Captain will feel 'lousy' when he wakes up. To avoid getting the blame for the mess in the house, he urges everyone to leave the place at once now that they have attained their goal.

Dora The madam of a local brothel in *Cannery Row*, Dora skillfully keeps her business running and 'booming' despite its illegal nature and the social opprobrium. She understands that her kind of business requires her to be 'twice as law abiding as anyone else', so she is 'especially philanthropic' when the circumstances require it. Moreover, being aware that any drunks, fights or 'vulgarity' would give the authorities a reason to close the Bear Flag, she has hired a watchman to help her with any such issues. She also knows that she has to accept her lowly status in the community and use her 'shameless dirty wages of sin' for taxes and donations to the local authorities and various institutions at a much higher rate than any other merchant in Cannery Row.

5. Weak

By contrast to the powerful matriarchs, Steinbeck constructed some weak male leaders. This was to show his criticism of the times' conventional views of gender (sexism) and point to it as a social construct rather than an innate right (for men).

Joseph As leader of the Wayne family, Joseph in *To A God Unknown* fails miserably and is unable to lead the family through the difficult times. When the old patriarch dies, the entire family accepts him as the 'unquestioned lord of the clan'. For a while, Joseph appears to succeed in his new role since both farm and family are thriving. When the severe drought starts settling in, though, his family gradually falls apart (Benjy gets killed, Burton leaves the farm, and Elizabeth dies). However, now that the dried-up land threatens the livestock with starvation, Joseph feels disappointed that he has 'failed to protect the land' rather than his family. He gives his son to Rama, and admits that he 'wouldn't know how to care for it'.

London Despite his physical strength, innate leadership skills and flair, London in *In Dubious Battle* lets himself be easily convinced by Mac's arguments for the necessity to organize his men to take action, and he goes on with the strike irrespective of the consequences. He confronts Mac for being a 'red radical' several times, but yet again Mac's skillful twist of words and subtle flattery make him believe that their action is justified. All throughout the story, London appears to speak for himself, but, whenever in doubt or in very difficult times, he turns to Mac and Jim for advice instead of making his own decisions to protect his men.

Pa In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Pa is the official 'head of the clan'. But when it comes to 'governing' the family, he hesitates to take decisions by himself. For example, Al asks him about the time they will set off, and Pa answers that he does not know and that the family will discuss it later that night. A moment when Pa's weakness is revealed yet again is during Ma's revolt at Tom's suggestion that he and Casy will catch up with the family as soon as their truck is repaired. Ma steps in front of Pa, categorically refusing to go while balancing a jack handle in her hand. Instead of using 'we', he uses 'you' when he tries to change

her mind: 'you got to go...you got to look after the family'. The whole group expects him to 'break into fury'. Instead, he feels rather 'amazed at the revolt' and his hands 'hung limply'. This is indicative of his acknowledging his wife's strength to lead his family firmly and confidently, which he cannot do.

6. Caring

In the context of the Depression that Steinbeck experienced himself and closely depicted in his novels, the underlying conclusion is that sympathy for others' misfortunes may save the human spirit from perdition. Steinbeck's stories place caring at the core of human relationships without which humankind cannot evolve.

Elizabeth In *To A God Unknown*, Elizabeth comes to understand her husband's behavior and deep connection with his land and tree. During the climbing tree scene at the beginning of their relationship, when Joseph shows her around the farm, and points to the oak tree, she senses Joseph's special connection with the tree. Elizabeth shows that she cares about him and his feelings when she 'strokes' its trunk and asks for permission to climb it. Her interest in the tree then triggers a 'strange intensity' in the way Joseph looks at her. Elizabeth asks about the reason of his sudden happiness, and he confesses to her that he thinks that the tree 'loved' and approved of her. She reacts naturally, and even joins in 'the game', saying that she can finally feel at home.

George In *Of Mice and Men*, George's soft side and affection for Lennie is evident in the way he defends him in front of the others. One of the most illustrative examples is the moment George realizes that Lennie is hiding a dead mouse in his hand. Fed up with Lennie's irresponsible behavior, George bursts out and tells him off angrily. However, as soon as he sees Lennie's 'anguished face', he feels ashamed of himself. Realizing how 'mean' he has been, George starts telling Lennie about their dream ranch and the rabbits he will get to pet to make him happy.

Tom Tom's attachment to his family is evident from the very outset of the story in *The Grapes of Wrath*. On his return from prison, Tom goes from worried to impatient and then angry when Muley, his neighbor, delays the answer to his question about the whereabouts of his family. When Ma is concerned about his crossing the state line while still on parole, Tom reassures her. His immediate aim is to protect the family, either by leading them or, as is the case is later on, by leaving them to find work somewhere else and avoid causing them trouble with the police.

Doc In *Cannery Row*, Doc cannot remain indifferent to suffering and often uses his medical knowledge to help the Cannery Row community. One such example is the moment an influenza epidemic breaks out among the residents. Since the doctors in Monterey are all busy with other cases and do not consider Cannery Row 'a very good financial risk', Doc makes desperate efforts to help the stricken families. He mobilizes Dora and her girls to help. Another time, Doc finds out about the hard time Frankie is given at home by the 'uncles' visiting his mother now that his father is dead. Moved by the boy's life story, he becomes protective of him. He lets Frankie continue to come to and even sleep at the lab when there is 'a crisis at home'. He also takes care of the boy's hygiene and clothing: he clips his hair, removes lice from it, teaches Frankie that he should wash his hands, and buys him new clothes. When Frankie fails to understand how to grade crayfish according to size, Doc patiently explains the procedure to him again.

Dora In *Cannery Row*, Dora does not remain impassive to the impoverished families and their 'hungry children' during the continuing economic hardship. Her kind-heartedness nearly gets her 'broke in the process' since she tops up her 'usual charities' with paying for the grocery bills for these families. During the later flu outbreak, her compassionate streak emerges again as she offers her help to Doc when she sees him exhausted and overwhelmed by the situation. Dora mobilizes her girls in shifts so as to keep her business up but also to help the sick children and their families, by taking some soup pots to them and sitting with them.