

The Paradox, which is America, which is Steinbeck.

The paradox in John Steinbeck's thought is a combination of a very American sort of individualism with a concept of group action that approaches Marxist philosophy. This combination seems incompatible with popular conception or misconception, according to Steinbeck, of the democratic principle. The composer extracts social elements from within the American dream, upholding a contradiction of whether he is in support of either theory. This is, on Steinbeck's part, an experiment of epic proportions which manifests a democratic type of socialism. Like American itself, his work is a vast, fascinating, paradoxical universe, where the composer is a model of American nostalgia and a counter reaction to the triumph of urbanization of the American culture¹. Steinbeck is a testament to a historical and sociological phenomenon concerned with the oppression of the down trodden masses during a period renowned for the proletarian² novel which 'flirted' with communism. America seems to live and breathe in a function of paradox, but in nothing are they so paradoxical as in their passionate beliefs in their own myths. The national dream of Americans is a whole pattern of thinking and feeling, which seems to be linked to an historic memory, surprisingly unchanged. It is called 'the American way of life'. No one can define it or point to any one person or group who lives it, but is very real nevertheless, more real than that equally remote dream the Russians call communism. These dreams describe vague yearnings toward what society wish and hope they may be. The fact that these dreams exist is an indication of their possibility. Steinbeck wrote neither to inspire nor to provoke, nor to condemn, but to understand and portray honestly, the aspect of American society he found most fascinating and perhaps

¹ Watt, F.W. (ed.) (1962). *Steinbeck*. London: Oliver And Boyd LTD.

² Alexanda, C. (ed.) (1981). *John Steinbeck's the Grapes Of Wrath*. New York: Monarch Press.

most bewildering. Steinbeck, ironically gives major strands of American philosophical ideals Marxist dimensions. Paradoxically, this creates a situation whereby the composer is both influenced by American traditions, yet at the same time is in support of what seems to be Marxist elements of American democracy. Steinbeck's idea however is not Russian but American and stems from Walt Whitman, not Karl Marx³. It does, contradictory to this, encapsulate elements that are seen as sinful to the orthodox American. The "Grapes of Wrath" develops old ideas in new ways. It traces the transformation of the passive individual to the active participant, the idealist becomes pragmatic⁴. It is an epic masterpiece of social consciousness in its picture of helpless people crushed by drought and depression. Closely related to this text is Steinbeck's earlier work "Of Mice and Men", since the subject is linked to the destructive power of illusion, provided by the American dream. The Garden of Eden myth manifests throughout the novel, as Steinbeck appropriates Edenic elements to the Marxist attributes the American dream pertains. To decipher the contradictions within Steinbeck, one must acknowledge he is a product of American society. What is seen as socialist theory in Steinbeck's work is derived from American ideas found primarily in Whitman and Emerson⁵. It is unfortunate for Steinbeck's total literary reputation that his novels, which received serious critical attention were sociologically orientated. This has caused many critics to read social criticism forcibly into all his works, it is nevertheless certainly true that social consciousness represents a basic element in his writing; it is the extraction of these social ideas from the loosely termed American dream which has been overlooked.

³ Hayashi, T. (ed.) (1974). *A Study Guide To Steinbeck*. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, INC.

⁴ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes Of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press.

⁵ Bloom, H. (ed.) (2000). *John Steinbeck, Blooms Major Novelists*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

The 1930's in America was the great decade of the proletarian⁶ novel, which sought explicitly to document the oppression of the downtrodden masses. During this period writers flirted heavily with the communist party⁷. "Grapes of Wrath" is a testament to an historical and sociological phenomenon, perhaps the greatest combined ecological and social catastrophe in American history. The novel serves as a powerful reminder of the struggle to organise the working class during the twenties and thirties, as well as to illustrate the widespread fears of communism that lasted throughout the era. Along with "Of Mice and Men" the texts bring together vital strands of American thought and history. Behind the political and historical message lies the so-called American myth. This myth is a pattern of thinking derived from a historical memory unchanged for years⁸. Otherwise known as 'the American way of life' a paradox is created by the American way of living, upholding values and moral viewpoints, yet existing in a society of stark contrast. Steinbeck as a product of America, transfers the paradox of his society into his literary work expressing the Marxist attributes existing within the American dream. A common factor of Steinbeck's text is the manifesting Garden of Eden myth, where Edenic elements⁹ are used to expose the author's personal interpretations of the American dream, which is that it contains and pertains to socialist theories. Displayed through the graphic, even anguished, description of the physical state of things and by implication, the mental state in the first chapter of the "Grapes of Wrath" is to make the responder aware of a similar pending social crisis. The reader notes that no particular

⁶ Alexander, C. (ed.) (1981). *John Steinbeck's The Grapes Of Wrath*. New York: Monarch Press.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Taylor, S. (1997). *Paradox and Dream* [Internet]. WWW.ocean.st.usm.edu/wsimkins/paradox.html: <URL> [09.07.2001]

⁹ Carlson, E. (ed.) (1968). *Symbolism in The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: The Viking Press.

people have yet been introduced. The rather generalized men, women and children seem to be actors in some ageless¹⁰ and universal drama.

“The people came out of their houses and smelled the stinging air and covered their noses from it... The men sat still – thinking – figuring.¹¹”

The persistent generalising and universalising force enables the personal saga of the Joads to take on more than just a document of the depression, implicating social and political factor of a broader scope. Steinbeck extends his theory on the democratic principle outside the boundaries of America. It seems that Steinbeck’s realizes that all forms of democracy are based upon the infamous ideals of Communism. It is through the economic and humanitarian crisis of the depression, that the composer has the ability to expose the contradictions which exist in American culture.

“If you could separate causes from results, if you could know that Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin were results, not causes, you might survive¹².”

To despise a theory that is the core of ideals American’s preach, seems bewildering to Steinbeck. To an extent, this justifies the use of the term epic. An epic takes as its subject a story of some general or national importance and scope¹³. Steinbeck evidently saw the Joads and his theory of the America dream as participants in just an experience. The experience was the philosophical and psychological impact, the destruction of an idea, an image and a faith, the great American dream, half material and half spiritual¹⁴. American was a new Eden, where there was the chance for individual effort to receive its just reward under a democratic system. Yet for millions of people America had become not a paradise but a purgatory. The façade of Eden or ‘Gods country’ covers a fallen world, a

¹⁰ Handley, G. (ed.) (1977). *Steinbeck The Grapes of Wrath*. Suffolk: The Chaucer Press.

¹¹ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bloom, H. (ed.) (2000). *Bloom’s Major Novelists*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

place which is filled with suffering.¹⁵ The fact that the setting for “Of Mice and Men” is a Californian valley, dictates according to the symbolism of Steinbeck's landscapes, that this story will also take place in a fallen world and that the quest for the illusive and illusory American dream will be of central thematic significance. Even greater than the “Grapes of Wrath” does Steinbeck demonstrate greater skills in merging the real setting of his country with the thematic structure of his novel. Consistently recognised in Lennie’s socialist dream of living “off the fatta the lan”¹⁶ on a little farm is the American dream of a new Eden, it becomes apparent that “Mosquito Coast” follows a similar theme. The composer Paul Theroux examines the search to rediscover Eden, yet contrary to Steinbeck, the quest is outside America. Through this rejection of America, Theroux also adopts Marxist principles, as Allie’s version of the American dream is based upon working class ethics. This notion is similar to the paradox found in Steinbeck’s work, that of a support of social ideals established through the quest to create the American dream. Allie’s tortured, quixotic genius drags through a gradually decadent and corrupted utopia. Like the Joads, George and Lennie the hope to find a new Eden, slowly disintegrates. The setting of Jeronimo symbolically reflects Allie’s attempt to re-create the American dream, ironically like the capitalist system they escaped, their utopia becomes infused with a thirst for power. It seems that this pattern of American conscience is an ongoing cycle, as Charlie creates his Eden away from Jeronimo to escape the injustice democracy found there,
“It stilled a longing in me for the United States”¹⁷

¹⁴ McCarthy, P. (ed.) (1980). *John Steinbeck*. New York; Ungar Publishing Co.

¹⁵ Bloom, H. (ed.) (1999). *John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House publishers.

¹⁶ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1999). *Of Mice And Men*. Oxford: Heinemann Books Ltd.

¹⁷ Theroux, P. (ed.) (1982). *The Mosquito Coast*. New York: Penguin Books.

Theroux, much like Steinbeck, expresses the American myth as illusionary and devoid of possibility, but more importantly, expresses the same values found in Communism to an important factor in American culture. Joseph Fontenrose, concerning "Of Mice and Men" states "the central image is the earthly paradise... It is a vision of Eden"¹⁸ Steinbeck allows no serious hope that George and Lennie will ever achieve their dream, very non-teleologically¹⁹, the composer accepts man is flawed and the Eden myth mere illusion. However, the contradiction occurs with the emphasis on the theme of commitment, hope and basic principles of life shared by Americans and Communists, which is the key ingredient in the creation of the Steinbeck hero. It is the hope within the people Steinbeck is concerned with. A true belief that the myth, however impossible to achieve has still a chance of becoming real. It is this driving force or hope which brings Stienbeck's character's alive. "Grapes of Wrath" is based largely on dialogue, connected with brief descriptive passages is almost baron of formal exposition. Although the subject matter and dialogue of the novel are occasionally shocking, the total effect on most readers is moving and sympathetic. Though the novel can be looked upon as naturalist text²⁰, the underlying symbolic current of the American dream is mainly present. Although perceived as left wing, the text is not communist, it stands closer to social liberalism²¹. Based theoretically upon the ideas of Marx and Lenin, the social philosophy which develops in "The Grapes of Wrath" is peculiarly American. Founded loosely on what is termed 'the American dream', which is a principle of democracy, it includes the right given to all under such a system to obtain the pioneer spirit of endurance, the will to forge ahead and succeed. The undesirable effects for this same urge are revealed in the form of

¹⁸ Bloom, H. (ed.) (2000). *Bloom's Major Novelists*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers

¹⁹ Alexanda, C. (ed.) (1981). *John Steinbeck's the Grapes Of Wrath*. New York: Monarch Press.

²⁰ Hayashi, T. (ed.) (1974). *A Study Guide To Steinbeck*. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, INC.

²¹ McCarthy, P. (ed.) (1980). *John Steinbeck*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing.

the grasping materialism and ruthless power interests in the novel. Specifically, the social theory which develops and is realised in action in “The Grapes of Wrath”, through the efforts of the Joads, is that which urges the small people, the poor people, those most in a position to be exploited and denied by the power of the profit hungry, to amass strength through banding together and taking group action. As the novel progresses, this idea first takes the form of worried, angry conversations among the frustrated men.

“We have guns. What if we banded together to fight the owners, the banks, the deputy sheriffs?²²”

The steady emergence of a concept of “we”; group action in the public sense, human compassion for one’s fellow man in the person sense²³, is really the whole thematic concentration of the mid-section of “The Grapes of Wrath”. This concept may seem to be typically Communist, but it is Steinbeck’s interesting ability to convert socialist ideals to suit American culture. Not only does he apply Marxist theory to American situations, Steinbeck is extracting the simple elements at the core of the American dream. Namely the consideration on one’s fellow man to overcome adversary. Depicted in the interchapters found in this section, are elaborate generalizations similar to a Greek chorus, filling in the background and commenting on the direction things are going.

“this is the beginning – from ‘I’ to ‘we’²⁴”

The ideal for the Oakies is presented in Weedpatch, the humane Government camp, where the Joads hope is temporarily restored. The camp is the most obvious Marxist symbol in the text, governed by the people and established through communal living. Its very name parallels the small patches of land thieved by the Oakies from the big farms to

²² Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

²³ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press.

²⁴ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

sustain themselves. The camp however, is a medium to obtain work and restore hope in its occupants of the American myth. It is the camp which creates the basis or platform for the American dream to be established. Contrary to the outside world, a new social structure is created on Marxist ideals, which in turn concerns itself to the very elements which Americans uphold. It is in Steinbeck's interest to explain that what people loosely label the American dream, is essentially a social conscience, with which orthodox Americans would disagree. For the one ruthless social lesson learned by the Joads and their like in the novel is that,

“separately we are weak, together we have strength.”²⁵

It is these ideals that Steinbeck acknowledges as the basis for the American dream, yet contradictorily the same theories are highly preached ideals of Marxism. Steinbeck expresses his support for such elements in the American myth, the basic care for humanity that the modern capitalist era has forgotten. The composer illustrates the strange American habit of turning everyone who is a nuisance into a non-American. The Oakies become virtually a race apart; they press their claim,

“We ain't foreign. Seven generations back American,.....Our folks in the revolution, an' they was lots of our folks in the Civil war – both sides. Americans.”²⁶

The Oakies become not only non-American but un-American²⁷. Casey and Tom, simply because they show opposition to the intolerable social conditions of the migrant labour camps are accused of being “commies”. Ironically and surprisingly similar to this, is the treatment of Steinbeck and his ideals. Like the Oakies, the composer is brandished a communist for questioning America's democratic principle. What the responder

²⁵ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ French, W. (ed.) (1963). *A Companion on 'The Grapes of Wrath'*. New York: Viking Press.

perceives is gradually developing and more pronounced as time goes on, namely the dual emotions of being an American and not being sure of what that really means. It is this naivete that rejects Steinbeck's attempt to prove the American dream and its associated democratic factors to be based on and include elements of Marxism ideology. Thus exposing the paradox of Steinbeck's thought, the possibility that he is both an American and is in support of the communist elements of the American myth at the same time. An idea rejected by orthodox American democrats. Steinbeck's ideals of the American dream are derived from Americans, such as Emerson and Whitman²⁸ who themselves sought to understand and transform the values of American culture. Similarly Steinbeck as an American, questions his society and through his feeble characters and situations exposes the contradictions in which America functions. Americans seem to live, breathe and function by paradox, but nothing are they so paradoxical about as in their own passionate beliefs in their own myths, to the extent of being ignorant to the fact their ideals are also that of Communists. It is through the Joads' quest and hopes to make the American myth possible that Steinbeck has the ability to question American ideals.

Evident in both the "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men" are strands of American influence, which re-enforce the composer's typically American attributes within his ideals and thought patterns. Such philosophies, or thematic strains, can be linked to what is known as Jeffersonian agrarianism²⁹, a form of democracy and way of life, ever-present in Steinbeck's work. That is, Steinbeck elevates farming as a way of life, if it is accompanied by love of and respect for the land. For those who love the land and make it a way of life, it takes on symbolic meaning. Through this ideal it is apparent

²⁸ Hayashi, T. (ed.) (1974). *A Study Guide to Steinbeck*. New Jersey: Scarecrow Press.

²⁹ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press.

that Steinbeck elevates the working class as the pinnacle or core of society. His sympathy for the plight of farmers against capitalist America is perceived as left wing.

“They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it.”³⁰

However Steinbeck establishes his theories from simple ideals Americans strive to uphold. The democratic theory that each man has an equal opportunity and being the land of opportunity, Steinbeck realizes America is no longer such a place, attempting to instill the simple values once found in the American dream back upon society. The composer’s nostalgic passion for the agrarian³¹ lifestyle is based on the ideals America once possessed. What seems as socialist theory, is largely based upon the historic ideals of Americans. Steinbeck simply acknowledges the Socialist aspects of American culture. It is the unconscious naivete of the American society to abhor a theory labeled communism, yet adhere to the same basic principles. Steineck attempts to encapsulate this pattern of thinking in his work, and in turn as American tradition serves, is also brandished with a Marxist label. This notion of Steinbeck’s thought is a paradox that the composer believes to be a justified theory. It may be seemingly absurd to believe American values are based on the same ideals of Marxism, though upon reading the composer’s work, the proposition becomes a well found statement of American society. People, like the Joads, Lennie and George identify with cycles of natural growth and as a contrast when the soils erode, at the same time the spirit of the people starts to erode. Ideally, the land can be a unifying force, bringing serenity, well being and importantly a sense of human dignity. The Jeffersonian³² ideal is a form of democracy and its focus is on man’s identification

³⁰ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

³¹ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press

³² McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press

with the land. But actual contact with the land is essential for such a democracy to work, for it is in this closeness to the very cycles of growth, whether frustrating or gratifying, that a man's measure of himself, his dignity, resides³³. Thus a form of human erosion and a disastrous one psychically is being uprooted from the land as the dust bowl people were. The psychic hold the land gets on a man, the meaningfulness of agrarianism as a way of life, is strongly urged throughout Steinbeck's work. As it is said in the "Grapes of Wrath" "I am thee land, the land is me."³⁴ Likewise if the land is taken away, then identity, hope and faith in the American myth are taken away. Rejecting capitalism and the oppression caused to the migrant workers, Steinbeck expresses due cause for what critics have perceived as an attack on American democracy.

"The bank-the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size."³⁵

This is not the composer's main focus, as it is through such extreme conditions of the depression Steinbeck that can illustrate the contradiction in the pattern of American thought. The social unrest, the tension between big business and the working class ethics exacerbates the tendencies American culture has in contradicting itself, namely the prejudice against communist agitators, yet excelling to create a society which at its core upholds the ideals that socialists preach. Charlotte Bronte in "Jane Eyre" sought a balance between social and moral conventions of her day and self-fulfillment. Due to this Jane negotiates her way between these opposing urges and manages to climb the social ladder, breaking class boundaries. Marxist interpretations relate to Jane's plight against class restriction of her time.

³³ Alexander, C. (ed.) (1981). *John Steinbeck's The Grapes Of Wrath*. New York: Monarch Press.

³⁴ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

³⁵ Ibid.

“No sir, I am an independent women now.³⁶”

Bronte’s cause, like Steinbeck’s “The Grapes Of Wrath” was not for the abolition of class structures, more as a provocative illustration into Victorian society. It seems quiet contradictory for Bronte to sustain an argument against the prejudice of class, yet adhere her women characters to traditional female gender roles. Specifically Janes financial independence and at the same time finding fulfillment in becoming a wife.

‘Of Mice and Men’ deals with mans thirst for the land, closely connected to the American dream. Lennie and George want nothing more than to live of the land in what seems a communist form of communal living. It is this love of the land which is the driving force in their life. The two men seem to have little else to aim for and again this dream of land unifies George and Lennie’s companionship. The American, Thomas Jefferson believed that all men should have the opportunity to own freehold landed property and he had great faith in the dignity which such independence and freedom could give man. Followers of Jefferson advocated that even if a man did not legally own land he claimed ownership if he lived on it and cultivated it³⁷. The Californian deputies chase migrants, who secretly cultivate patches of land, illustrating the loss of equal opportunity, in a so-called democracy.

“Pretty soon you’d think the owned it...the cop was right. A crop raised – why, that make ownership.³⁸”

Steinbeck uses the tractor to represent modern farming technology, the onslaught of capitalism and describes it as monster, comparing its movements and strength to that of insects. This strength which overcomes natural obstacles can generate admiration, the

³⁶ Bronte, C. (ed.) (1996). *Jane Eyre*. London: Penguin Books.

³⁷ Watt, F. (ed.) (1962). Steinbeck. London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd.

³⁸ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

strength which destroys a man's home can provoke anger and contempt. Technology cultivating the land is looked upon as a cold and monstrous rape³⁹. However, contradictory to this thought, Steinbeck introduces a different view of the use of technology,

"Is a tractor bad? Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong? If this tractor were ours it would be good-not mine, but ours. If our tractor turned the long furrows of our land, it would be good. Not my land but ours. We could love that tractor then as we loved this land when it was ours. But this tractor does two things – it turns the land and turns us off the land⁴⁰,"

Steinbeck rejects the idea that machinery and farming necessarily destroy man's identity, if it is used in association with the simple ideals that America once up held. The starving people in California need food and efficient farming can provide it, yet sadly manipulated prices hinder man's success in producing such benefits. The kind of stubbornness and persistence of the working class is symbolised early in the "The Grapes of Wrath", which describes clearly and vividly the slow, imperturbable, unending journey of the land turtle.

The turtle, which appears and reappears, symbolises survival, for the driving life in all mankind. For the turtle slowly but steadily advance past every obstacle it encounters.

"Lying on its back, the turtle was tight in its shell for a long time. But at last its legs waved in the air, reaching for something to pull it over. Its front foot caught a piece of quartz and little by little the shell pulled over and flopped upright.⁴¹" Steinbeck like

Marxists acknowledges the plight of the everyman, the oppressed working class and their importance in society. This theory although socialist is one also shared by many

³⁹ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press

⁴⁰ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Americans. The nostalgic belief that America relies heavily on the persistent workingman to sustain the nation is labeled communist. The composer's interest however is with American culture and its gradual loss of such simple values. The concluding image of Rose of Sharon is consciously sensational, to the embarrassment of the readers and creating a strong sense of decorum. But Steinbeck's intention is clear, he wanted to end with a powerful symbol of human life persisting despite the hostility of social forms and of nature, which resulted in a destructive storm, a still born child and starvation. In humiliation, discord and chaos, life struggles and however gross and incongruous its mean, survives and is reborn out of the tempest, through human courage, choice and love⁴².

“Then slowly she lay down beside him...Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. ‘You got to,’ she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close.... She looked across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.⁴³”

“The Grapes of Wrath” becomes a story of mankind's quest for profound comprehension of his commitment to his fellow man and to the earth he inhabits. It is Steinbeck's belief in humanity and respect for the average American that is perceived as socialist innuendo. The struggle of the depression and human beings persevering spirit serves as a reminder to the American community the similarities between their democratic principles and Marxist ideology. In theory Steinbeck is sentimental in values, his nostalgia with the depressed working class people is upheld in most of his work and for this he is considered to preach social theory. The composer aims to relate and help relate to, any

⁴² Handley, G. (ed.) (1977). *Steinbeck The Grapes of Wrath*. Suffolk: The Chaucer Press.

⁴³ Steinbeck, J. (ed.) (1990). *The Grapes Of Wrath*. Suffolk: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

minority or outcast group of American society who have connections to the natural world, whether it be farmers or the unemployed. The author's emphasis is on the natural over the supernatural, but nature in its phenomena and cycles offers even more than simple analogy⁴⁴, Steinbeck suggests. It offers an almost spiritual comfort and encourages an earth-founded⁴⁵ optimism. An ideal which was at the heart of American tradition and culture, which has slowly been lost to economic necessity. The simple ideals once held by America, are valued by Steinbeck and coincidentally are paralleled to an extent in Communist theories.

The paradox in John Steinbeck's thought is seemingly absurd, though perhaps a well-founded statement, conflicting with the preconceived notions of American democracy. It is Steinbeck's ability to extract Marxist elements from within American ideology that has confronted orthodox democratic values. The distinct boundaries that lie between America and communist principles are distorted by Steinbeck's unique focus upon the socialist elements of the American culture. Steinbeck's concept is not Russian but American and stems from Walt Whitman, not Karl Marx.⁴⁶ Specific element of the American dream and Jeffersonian agrarianism are exacerbated to justify the similarities between two opposing political stances. The notion that Steinbeck is in support of socialist elements of American society is a paradox of epic proportions, as it questions democracies ignorant abhorrence of anything bordering on Marxist philosophy. The nostalgic pleas of agrarianism⁴⁷ through the ever-artistic landscapes, create a masterpiece of social consciousness in a picture of helpless people crushed by drought and depression. Through such portraits of humanity Steinbeck acknowledges the simple values of life and

⁴⁴ Bloom, H. (ed.) (2000). *Bloom's Major Novelists*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

⁴⁵ Bloom, H. (ed.) (1999). *John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House publishers.

⁴⁶ Hayashi, T. (ed.) (1974). *A Study Guide To Steinbeck*. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, INC.

⁴⁷ McKenna, C.W.F. (ed.) (1980). *Notes On The Grapes of Wrath*. Hong Kong: York Press

at America's core the working class to be the pinnacle of society. It is this pioneering spirit in the face of adversary that drives a nation forward, a concept both extracted from America and found within socialism. The composer's ideals presented through "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men" are established from the values once upheld in the land of opportunity; the Promised Land⁴⁸ whereby and dream can be reality; the American dream. That is founded on basic principles, which Steinbeck acknowledges to be similar to that of Marx and Lenin. Unfortunately for Steinbeck's total literary reputation, critics read social criticism forcibly into his works, constantly overlooking the composer's significant direction. It is nevertheless true that social consciousness represents a basic element in such texts as "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men", it is the extraction of these 'communist policies from the American culture which is naively ignored. It is apparent that not only is Steinbeck an American in thought, he supports ideology Americans upholds. He simple recognizes and approves the socialist theories found in American democracy. Ensuring, the paradox which is Steinbeck, is America.

⁴⁸ McCarthy, P. (ed.) (1980). *John Steinbeck*. New York: Ungar Publishing Co.

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Reflective Statement.

The concept of my analysis evolved from the critical responses Steinbeck has received. Branded as a Marxist for attacking American society, I felt Steinbeck's literature and philosophical theories had been given little justification through past interpretations. It became clear that Steinbeck's attack of American sociology had further depth than given credit for. I choose to study Steinbeck's thought, to justify his values and principles concerning the American culture, which have been misunderstood. Many critics have, after reading Steinbeck's work delivered a condemning argument referring to him as a Marxist simply because the composer attacks American society. This seems to be an American tradition, as it is reflected in the "Grapes of Wrath", whereby any questioning of the system is perceived to be incited by communist ideals. I found that this questioning of America and its values is what has led to Steinbeck's unpopularity with critics, contrary to public popularity. Steinbeck as an American, reflects through his literature, a true American view of their society, in which a paradoxical universe of values, morals and thought patterns are exposed. A focus on the American dream reveals the contradictions in which America thrives and where Steinbeck establishes his 'socialist' theories. That is, Steinbeck realises the American myth to be based on communist ideals, yet with an emphasis on capital gain. For me to fully understand this theory, research into the composer's influences is essential, as this brings together the vital strands which create Steinbeck's theories. This obviously started with the reading of the texts and then lead onto the research of critical responses. After which a gap was left and the historical context of Steinbeck's work needed evaluation to fill this in, as with his literary techniques. This in turn lead to the analysis of themes and political directions, which created the structure of my critical response. Critics have given the author little

encouragement and when his work is analysed criticism seems indirect and uncertain. My study of Steinbeck's work aims to expose his true patterns of thought and to clarify that the composer can be classified as a typical American.

Whilst researching Steinbeck's criticisms it is extraordinary to find little analysis of his philosophical content. Most critics have directed their focus towards Steinbeck's artist qualities and his attack on capitalism. I have found however, that this is not Steinbeck's major encouragement for writing. Initially caught within the confines that previous critical works have followed, I started to question whether these past analyses truly gave justice to Steinbeck's work. Slowly my focus drifted from that of previous criticism, to the ever present, yet little talked of American dream, which lay within each Steinbeck novel. Each critic seemed to make passing reference to the American myth, but never was there any real insight shown. During an assessable interview and explaining my theory of the American dream and socialism, I by mere chance contradicted myself trying to think out Steinbeck's themes. I was then left with the challenge of reinterpreting my own theories of Steinbeck's values, as I seemed to have stumbled upon Steinbeck's own paradox within my own confusion. Thus, I aimed to reveal what Steinbeck aimed also to expose, that the political contradictions within American culture, focused on the communist elements of the American myth. The main area of research needed was the cultural context in which Steinbeck wrote. The depression of the 1930's to 1940's and Steineck's connections to this had to be evaluated to gain an understanding for its significance in the scheme of Steinbeck's pattern of thought.

My analysis would pose an interest to any that have read Steinbeck's novels and condemned them as communist writings. As I have attempted to expose the theory behind Steinbeck's socialist orientated values. That is, these values are based, not on the ideal of

Marx or Lenin, but traditional American principles. It interprets the work in an original fashion, by exposing and proving that Steinbeck is in fact typically American and his views are based largely on typical American values. In turn this would provide future students with a varied opinion of Steinbeck and add another dimension to the critical responses already written. This essay confronts existing papers, and proves contrary ideas. This then enables the responder to have a different perspective and make a conclusion on all the evidence. My critical response would belong in a book of collective criticism, as it would provide a differing opinion. Much of the interpretations available provide minor aspects of Steinbeck's thought, there is little to compare and contrast with, thus leaving a one sided argument. I aimed to establish an original argument and prove the idea that Steinbeck is an American at heart, although he in support of the socialist elements found in American society.

The concepts of the critical response were based on the American dream, Steinbeck's major influences when writing and the extracts of socialism. This was constructed, by means of three sections with an undercurrent concerning Steinbeck's proposed paradox. This meant synthesizing the three sections with the concept of contradictions and Marxist values of the American myth. Each section argues that Steinbeck is typically American, then contradicting that by proving Steinbeck's paradoxical views of the American culture. This process was aimed at paralleling Steinbeck's thought and depicting in the simplest manner how Steinbeck's ideology is established. This structural idea was created by a layered plan, where each piece of necessary research was interpretation was placed in its related order to the question posed. The themes and ideas of the 'Grapes of Wrath' and 'Of Mice and Men' can be closely associated with 'Mosquito Coast' and 'Jane Eyre' from both the Higher School

Certificate and the preliminary course. The American myth is an important part of Steinbeck's work and is a major theme in 'Mosquito Coast', where the search for the elusive Eden pesters mankind. The Marxist elements of Steinbeck's work can be related to 'Jane Eyre', where through the protagonist Charlotte Bronte questions the morality of class structures for her time, much like Steinbeck's use of the depression, Bronte's Victorian society reflects the oppression caused by divisions in class. Upon reading and researching "Tortilla Flat", I choose not to incorporate in my critical response as I found it had little importance in my argument of the Marxist concepts in the American democracy

My initial concept was focused on the bad critical responses that Steinbeck had received contrary to his popularity. This meant studying the composer worth as an author and his artistic qualities. Upon more research and a bit of luck I developed a question to create an original argument concerning Steinbeck's paradoxical notions of thought. I have tried to prove through my argument that Steinbeck is in fact typically American. What seems to be Communist philosophy is based on the American dream, socialist ideals are in fact the basis of American culture. Steinbeck is a reflection of American thought and exposes the contradictions of which America survives. This idea is confronting to the orthodox American and thus he has simply been labeled a Communist. It is nevertheless true social consciousness represents a basic element in both texts "The Grapes Of Wrath" and 'Of Mice And Men', it is the extraction of these socialist policies from the American culture which is naively ignored.