

VARIATION OF IMAGE IN STEINBECK'S OF MICE AND MEN:
NOVEL, PLAY, AND SCREENPLAY

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Variation of Image in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men:
Novel, Play, and Screenplay

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Of Master of Arts

By
Homer Alexander
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ABSTRACT

Steinbeck's creative process was influenced by technical requirements inherent in three related genres: novel, drama, and film. Steinbeck produces a high caliber literary work which translates into several genres by integrating compatible principles from each form.

Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men serves as a model because it was the first book he conceived of as a "play/novelette" and because he saw its successful production as novel, play, and film. Imagery is the common denominator between the forms, and it is through imagery that this story translates into various genres. For Steinbeck, the book took on a life of its own which was affected by its unique shape, " . . . the hard finish, objective form which is the direction of the novel not only points in the direction of drama, but seems consciously to have aimed at it." It was imagery which was adapted to the story to fit various genres effectively. Whereas reading requires the reader's imaginative participation, film involves the viewer's sensory organs in ways unique to that medium. Drama on the other hand requires audience imagination because of its limited stage settings while yet providing much of the visual and auditory stimulation of film. Though literary works which succeed in more than one genre are often viewed with suspicion by both the critical and artistic communities, Steinbeck takes a dramatic novelistic perspective which circumvents these

entanglements as he fulfills the criteria set forth for literature.

Viewing the work as a genuine hybrid, not just an adaptation, will enable the critic to see Steinbeck's genre experimentation as contributory to his unique artistic and philosophical development.

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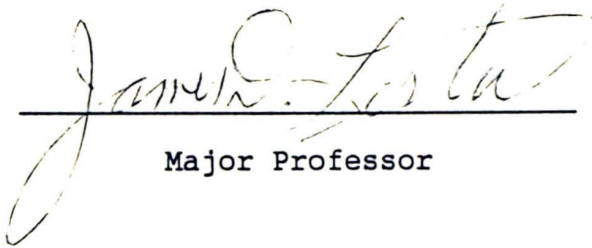
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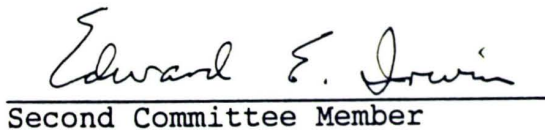
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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Homer Alexander entitled " Variation of Image in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men: Novel, Play, and Screenplay." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

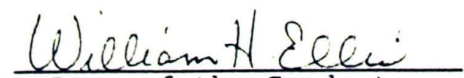

Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


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Accepted for the Graduate
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Also thanks to my family members who were always willing to believe me when I refused yet another invitation to eat dinner or to go fishing with the muttered words, "I just about have the conclusion done."

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study focuses on Steinbeck's interest in experimentation. The study will investigate the success of his novel Of Mice and Men (1937) in its three genre forms: novel, drama, and screenplay. Of Mice and Men is of singular literary importance, for it is a work which has been molded by the requirements of each genre, yet it has sacrificed nothing in literary quality to do so. In this regard, there seems little which recommends this approach if experience of critics and writers is taken into account. In fact, literary works which succeed in more than one genre are often viewed with suspicion by both the critical and artistic communities. As Joy Gould Boyum illustrates in her recent book, Fiction Into Film, distinctions between film and fiction are often not helpful in defining either medium. In fact, the existing definitions tend to create semantic problems.

Boyum quotes George Bluestone to illustrate one dimension of this issue: "Despite superficial similarities, the movie and the novel are essentially antithetical forms and film adaptation will, even at its very best, be a lesser work of art than its source" (qtd. in Boyum, 8). Boyum disagrees with Bluestone's view and explains, "Implicit throughout his [Bluestone's] discussion is the crucial assumption that words, rather than images, make superior medium" (9). She argues that "film proves elusive to the theorist who would isolate its defining qualities" (12). Boyum goes on to defend film works adapted from fiction, as a

valid art form which, drawing from fictional models for adaptation, can be, in their own right, superior to the original work of fiction.

Franklin E. Court argues yet another point of view, that neither fiction nor (presumably) film are superior mediums in any regard, rather drama is. Court specifically cites Of Mice and Men as superior in its dramatic form: "By his own admission, Steinbeck used the play-novelette form in order to keep the work terse and concise. The play, however, is a much better demonstration of that concern than the novel. Its structure is tight and unified; no dialogue is wasted; the action is integrally related" (qtd. in Hayashi, 161).

Annie Dillard defends literature against, or rather in spite of, film in her recent book The Writing Life (1990). She perhaps better than others explains differences between genres because she sees literature from the reader's point of view. She argues that reading requires the reader's imaginative participation whereas film and television involve the viewers sensory organs in ways unique to the film medium. Dillard explains that, "The reader's ear must adjust down from loud life to the subtle, imaginary sounds of the written word. An ordinary reader picking up a book can't yet hear a thing." Film and television involve, on the other hand, "the body's senses" in real rather than the imaginary ways (17-18). The sheer magnitude of a visual image on screen, the shifting light stimulating the eye, the music filling the auditory canal, are major ways that sense organs are bombarded by the filmic medium. Dillard describes the power

of film in this way:

A nine foot handsome face, and its three-foot-wide smile, are irresistible. Look at the long legs of that man, as high as a wall, and coming straight toward you. The music builds. The moving lighted screen fills your brain. You do not like filmed car chases? See if you can turn away. Try not to watch. Even knowing you are manipulated, you are still helpless. (18)

Printed media neither can nor should compete with film in this way. "Novels written with film contracts in mind have a faint but unmistakable, and ruinous odor," she argues, pointing out that, "Such books seem uneasy being books" (18-19). Books, she asserts, should offer something else, something subtle and imaginative, something moral and intellectual--qualities she defines as literary. "In my view, the more literary the book--the more purely verbal, crafted sentence by sentence, the more imaginative, reasoned, and deep--the more likely people are to read it" (18-19).

On the positive side, Steinbeck takes a dramatic-novelistic perspective which circumvents these entanglements as he fulfills the criteria set forth by Dillard for literature. Steinbeck understood the significance of Of Mice and Men when he was well into the final stages of writing this book. For him, the book seems to have taken on a life of its own which was affected by its unique form. Steinbeck describes the evolution of the book's form in this way:

For some years the novel [Of Mice and Men] has increasingly taken on the attributes of the drama. Thus the hard finish, objective form which is the direction of the modern novel not only points in the direction of drama, but seems consciously to have aimed at it. To read an objective novel is to see a little play in your head. All right, why not make it so you can see it on stage? This experiment, then, is really only a conclusion toward which the novel has been unconsciously heading for some time. (qtd. in Butler, Chap. 1)

So skillful was Steinbeck with his dramatic-novelistic forms that his stories are easily translated between genres. Technically they work. George S. Kaufman (famous playwright and director), on the occasion of writing Steinbeck during the Broadway stage production of Of Mice and Men, writes that Of Mice and Men "drops almost naturally into play form and no one knows that better than you" (Letters, 136). Joseph Millichap in his book Steinbeck and Film observes that "Steinbeck's best works translate smoothly to the screen because they are essentially filmic, drawing their inspiration from realistic tradition of documentary photography and film; they in turn provided inspiration for filmic works in the same mode" (5).

Warren French, noted Steinbeck critic, shows that Steinbeck's philosophical perspective contributed to his experimental form as well: "Steinbeck's preoccupation with Ed Rickett's nonteleological concept that what things are

matters less than the fact that they are led to the Naturalistic fable. . . . This narrative [Of Mice and Men] differs from Steinbeck's earlier ones in that it was deliberately conceived as a novelette that might be turned without revision into a play" (87).

Of Mice and Men was Steinbeck's first, fully developed experimental hybrid. In choosing this unique form, Steinbeck employed technical skills which are at once dramatic, novelistic, and filmic. Paul McCarthy notes that "all aspects of the novel are finely done" (61). McCarthy credits Steinbeck for a "restricted focus," "a skilfully managed third-person point-of-view," and "concentration, with exceptions, on exteriors: a river bank, a bunkhouse, a character's appearance, card players" (qtd. in Hayashi, 61). As necessary for drama and film, McCarthy says, "Thoughts, recollections, and fantasies are directly expressed by the characters involved" (61).

Richard Astro, another noted Steinbeck scholar, points out that the novel is significant in terms of its theme and social vision of America. "Of Mice and Men reflects the novelist's awakening political consciousness and, in particular, his interest in agrarian reform as a viable solution to the American economic crisis of the 1930's" (qtd. in Hayashi, 104). Astro argues, however, that "Steinbeck's real subject in Of Mice and Men is the frail nature of primeval innocence, a theme which emerges through the author's compassionate treatment of the futile attempt of Lennie and his partner, George Milton, to translate an

impossible dream into reality" (104).

John F. Slater sees the story as "not about the alignment of massive economic forces" but rather as a story "interested in how modular groups of people, even two men together, formulate effective myths of social cohesion; but the emphasis is on individual performance or its failure, not monolithic external factors." Though Slater sees Steinbeck as "steadfastly sympathetic" toward men less fortunate than himself, "on this occasion, however, the overwhelming power that leads to the prosperity of those who harness it while maiming countless unenfranchised victims is represented, not by titanic accumulations of economic might but by the supremacy of Steinbeck's own verbal and imaginative faculties" (qtd. in Hayashi, 132).

Each of these critics, be they film critic, literary critic, or drama critic, measures Of Mice and Men and finds its dimensions large and grand. Yet, each critic gauges the work by a different measuring instrument. Herein lies the true significance of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. Steinbeck had accomplished his goal of creating an adaptable media-hybrid.

Of Mice and Men was the beginning of a life long experiment. Steinbeck was to return with numerous adaptations translated into other media which, as Robert E. Morseberger points out, "passed then into popular culture as a part of the heritage of his times" (258). Morseberger briefly sums up the scope of this phenomenon:

Not only have Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, The

Grapes of Wrath, The Red Pony, and Cannery Row, become almost legendary in a sense that few other works of fiction have, but from Steinbeck's fiction have come a folk song, "Tom Joad"; a ballet, "Curley's wife"; an opera, Of Mice and Men; two distinctive musical scores by Aaron Copland; illustrations by Orozco and Thomas Hart Benton; and a round dozen motion pictures plus several notable television productions. In addition, Steinbeck wrote two films, The Forgotten Village and Viva Zapata, directly for the screen. Of the motion pictures, none are less than competent, and a remarkable number have become film classics, more than from the work of any other American writer.

(qtd. in Hayashi, 258)

Literature which succeeds in this way is unique indeed. It is writing embodying all the best and most admirable attributes of fiction, while in this case it was conceived in the writer's mind as something else, as a play or a film.

This thesis stands apart from extant criticism, for it assumes a critical posture which treats film, screenplay, and novel as familial arts whose boundaries often overlap, as media which are similar to one another in content, purpose, and artistic merit, but as media which differ in terms of contrasting technical possibilities. The focus, then, is on the variations between genres which occur in one crucial area: imagery. Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men provides a valid framework for this inquiry because of Steinbeck's concern for

the issues raised by each genre, and because Of Mice and Men
ultimately enjoyed success in each medium.

CHAPTER 2

Images of Place

A study of the variation of image provides an effective framework for investigation of Steinbeck's genre experiments because it is through image that the most consequential variation occurs. Images are the flexible elements within the fixed plot.

Adaptation occurs primarily in visual imagery. So it is that images of place, especially the ranch and the river, provide the backdrop for the story. Though this limited setting-context may at first appear overtly simple, Steinbeck intentionally devises it to illuminate a dark, foreboding mood and to focus attention on the story itself. The images of place, for this reason, act as background environments which operate as symbolic icons to augment the story's theme. Karl Jung explains that symbolic icons, like myth, often perform their duties subconsciously in the human psyche by having one foot in the real world and another foot in the human subconscious. In this way, icons contain at least two meanings, and they function as compact metaphors for often complex and subliminal ideas. In Of Mice and Men consequential images of place function as icons: the forest (primeval garden) and the ranch (settlement of man).

Warren French attributes Steinbeck's tendency toward simplicity to "his tendency to write allegorically" (Preface). French explains, "the ancient art of discussing one thing, especially an unfamiliar or abstract concept, by talking about something familiar that stands for the

unfamiliar" (Preface). Allegory, French points out, is "distrusted in the twentieth century; and an increasing amount of literature strives to be merely unfocused reporting." He adds, "The difference between the reporter and the allegorist is that the reporter seeks simply to collect facts whereas the allegorist looks for a pattern in the event around which the account of it may be organized. The reporter is interested in what makes it unique, while the allegorist is concerned with what makes it typical of recurrent patterns of human behaving" (Preface). It is with the allegorist's sensibility and not the reporter's sensibility that Steinbeck chooses simple settings which afford a forum for universal symbolic patterns. For Steinbeck, the forest primeval is such a place.

The novelist represents the garden/forest as the human unconscious, a place at once Edenic and enigmatic, spiritual yet carnal, visible and yet unknowable. Steinbeck portrays the complexity of the forest by referring to numerous seasons, autumn especially, but also by juxtaposing the autumn season with others: "willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of winter's flooding" (1). In addition, Steinbeck presents his primeval forest with a complete natural ecosystem inhabited by undomesticated animals: quail, rabbits, deer, coons, a heron. Steinbeck is careful to link this world to man's world. As the day implodes into dark, the sound of leaves crackling reverberates alarm, scatters wild animals, and Lennie and George trespass upon an eerie

and forbidding place. Yet, the foreboding forest equally denotes an endowment of life, for the primeval forest ironically furnishes George and Lennie the primary life sustaining element: water. When George and Lennie finally walk into the clearing by the river, Steinbeck alludes to a dramatic piece of Judeo-Christian mythology. Like the warriors not selected by King David, Lennie lies on his belly and drinks from the pool; like those chosen, George scoops water watching for danger as he does so. Steinbeck seems to be saying: the seriousness of George and Lennie's story is the seriousness of war.

As the novel opens, the setting is "a few miles south of Soledad" (1), along the Salinas River. The novel introduces us to an expansive scene which is framed by the distant Gabilan mountains, and then the focus moves in tightly to a specific pool on the river, a place where there is a sandy willow-lined bank with large sycamore trees "with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool" (1). There is a path, we are told, "beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool" (1). On this particular day, rabbits "sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones" (2), and as footsteps are audible from the direction of the highway, "A stilted heron labored up into the air and pounded down river" (2), abandoning the place to a momentary lifelessness. The forest images satisfy a dual purpose--as a technical device to provide the setting for action, and as an archetypal force consistent with the Jungian model of the unconscious. The forest represents the

impulse toward death and self-destruction, a return to the inanimate matter of which all beings are composed. The story moves from life (river) to death (forest) to life (river). As Roger Rosenblatt notes of the forest image's subconscious power, "not for nothing did Frost give death the ownership of his woods, or did the creators of fairy tales see them as places where wolves hungered for little girls" (30).

Because large and expansive narrative description of the river scene are impossible in drama, the forest exists in the play without description. Simple stage directions communicate the idea: "A sandy bank of the Salinas River sheltered with willows--one giant sycamore right, upstage. The stage is covered with dry leaves. The feeling of the stage is sheltered and quiet" (644). The playwright weaves patterns of sound effect to energize the mood of the forest: "A sparrow is singing. There is the distant sound of ranch dogs barking aimlessly and one clear quail call. The quail call turns to a warning call and there is a beat of the flock's wings. Two figures are seen entering the stage in a single file . . . " (644). The idea of the forest as a place of mystery, life, and death strikes the audience subconsciously. The play, however, accomplishes much the same thing as the novel.

Milestone, true to his feelings that a director should foremost reflect the author's vision when directing a film adaptation of a novel, seeks to "restate in filmic terms [his] agreement with whatever the author of a story . . . is trying to say" (Millichap, 13). The film image of forest and

ranch varies because it lacks the descriptive depth of the forest image provided in the novel; nevertheless, it opens with the familiar animal images: rabbits and crows and deer. These elements suggest the environmental complexity in which Lennie and George find themselves. The film, however, shifts at this point. It does not open at the river proper, as do the novel and the play. Rather, the film opens with an exciting chase scene. Lennie and George run from a vigilante band in Weed, hide in the river, and finally hop a freight train which is leaving town.

The film is weakened thematically by opening the story in Weed, but Milestone achieves a great degree of dramatic interest by interpolating this action scene. At the end of the film, Milestone reinforces this theme by inventing a montage of animal images in the river setting. Most notable is his creation of crows perched on a limb and a coal-black squirrel, probably rendered through animation, climbing a sycamore tree. The animated, black squirrel ironically underscores the dark theme of the forest as both place of life, place of death, and place of mystery.

CHAPTER 3

The Ranch

Steinbeck uses the ranch in the novel as an icon of the real world and of domestic life. But the ranch symbolically represents a struggle between what Lennie and George must do and what they wish they could do. They must on the one hand work in order to achieve their dream, while on the other hand they wish they could retire to the comfortable and secure world of their own place.

The ranch, for this reason, is a negative place. The novelist essentially describes the ranch as a place of hard, physical labor which produces precious little in return. For this reason, the ranch is also a labyrinth. It is a maze of both work and of life, neither separated from the other. The cycle is vicious and chaotic. The symbolic significance of the ranch was noted in Martha Heasley Cox's paper:

"Environment as Meaning in John Steinbeck's Work." Cox explains that "as Steinbeck's characters interact with their environment, as the outerworld serves as corrective and sometimes ironic counterpoint for the inner landscape, the sights, sounds, and scents of the land inform Steinbeck's fiction and give it meaning" (Quarterly, 5).

Steinbeck first introduces us to the ranch in Chapter 2. He describes the man-made aspects of the ranch only to emphasize its labyrinthian qualities: the buildings inside and out, the long rectangular building, bunks, magazines, and a stove (19). Although he makes frequent references to dinner and meals, the novelist never actually describes them.

The effect focuses on work and how it subordinates life. Neither the characters nor the reader participates in the pleasurable experience of eating and drinking. The descriptions of the dreary and impersonal bunkhouse are, however, made concrete:

Against the walls were eight bunks, five of them made up with blankets and the other three showing their burlap ticking. Over each bunk there was nailed an apple box with the opening forward so that it made two shelves for the personal belongings of the occupant of the bunk (19).

The only human dimension of the scene, provided by the occupants themselves, sits in the center of the room, "a big square table littered with playing cards, and around it were grouped boxes for the players to sit on" (19).

George's discussion with Candy about lice also reinforces the idea of the ranch as labyrinth. Not only do Lennie and George face the prospect of extreme physical exertion, they face the prospect of little rest. "George stepped over and threw his blankets down on the burlap sack of straw that was a mattress. He looked into his box shelf and then picked a small yellow can from it. 'Say. What the Hell's this?'

'I don't know,' said the old man.

'Says positively kills lice, roaches, and other scourges.' What the hell kind of bed you giving us, anyways. We don't want no pants rabbits'" (20).

The images associated with recreation, like the nightly

card games, remain always in the background behind concerns of work. As the others play cards after dinner, Slim leaves the bunkhouse to go to the barn to work on the mule's split hoof (54-55). The reader draws one conclusion about the ranch: there is precious little life to be had after work. The drama maintains Steinbeck's vision of the ranch as a negative place balanced between real-world requirements and life-sustaining dream. In the play, variation occurs because the audience is not allowed to savor the fruits of the labor any more than are the ranchhands. Distance from physical gratification tends to reinforce the power of George and Lennie's dream by making the dream the most tangible and desirable "object" in the play. Since George and Lennie's dream of a place of their own fulfills a universal human need, the audience, sympathetic to George and Lennie's desire, finds the image of the ranch distasteful.

We are first introduced to the image of the ranch in Act 1, Scene 2. Stage directions call for "the interior of a bunkhouse. Walls white-washed board and bat. Floor unpainted. There is a heavy square table with upended boxes around it used for chairs. Over each bunk there is a box nailed to the wall which serves as two shelves on which are the private possessions of the working men. On top of each bunk there is a large, noisy alarm clock ticking madly" (649). The variation of the large and noisily ticking alarm clock is the first obvious addition to the setting. It juxtaposes the external concern for schedules and work with rest and relaxation. Figuratively, the fight between the

dream world of sleep and real world of work parallels Lennie and George's dream world and the real world ranch. In addition, white-washed walls and unpainted floors reflect the attitude of the ranch owners for these men. The cheapest paint is used; the floors are naked; and, as in the novel, discarded packing crates provide the essential furnishing.

Little variation in the discussion between Candy and George is of note, except that instead of "pants rabbits," lice are referred to as "pillow pigeons." The word "pillow" serves to more clearly exemplify the idea that the vermin prevent sleep (which is one of the few recreations afforded to the ranchhands).

In the opening of Act 2, scene 1, stage directions indicate that "Slim and George come into the darkening bunkhouse together" (658); this sets a dark, foreboding tone which is similar to the tone of the novel. Here the play excels in overlaying images of recreation with those of work. For example, while the action is taking place in the bunkhouse, the sound of the ranchhands playing horseshoes is heard in the background: "from the outside comes the sound of a horseshoe game. Thuds on the dirt and occasional clangs as a shoe hits the peg. Now and then voices are raised in approval or derision; 'That's a good one' . . . 'Goddamn right it's a good one' . . . 'Here goes for a ringer. I need a ringer' . . . 'Goddamn near got it, too'" (658). This antithesis of dark bunkhouse and exuberant joy outside serves to give depth to George and Slim's conversation about George's dream by providing work with its complement, its

antithesis, its foil. Against a cacophony of gleeful human noises, George focuses the audience's attention on contrasting human disillusion. "If I was bright, if I was even a little smart, I'd have my own place and I'd be bringin' in my own crops 'stead of doin' all the work and not gettin' what comes up out of the ground" (658).

The film succeeds in its portrayal of George and Lennie's dream by enlarging the beauty of the real-world ranch with panoramic visual imagery. The ranch icon, for Milestone, is larger than the ranch icon in either the novel or the play. Millichap explains that film allows

Milestone to do some nice composition with visual elements, like the sinewy bodies of the ranchhands in the outdoor washhouse and the heaping piles of plain food on the tables of the cookshack. He also interpolates a contrasting dinner scene at the ranchhouse, where the boss and Curley wolf down their food as Mae simmers in silence. Finally, she asks Curley to take her out to the movies, but he saunters out saying that he has seen the picture with the 'boys.' Mae is left behind with her indifferent father-in-law and the antagonistic Chinese cook. (Millichap, 21)

Giving visual portrayal to these scenes makes Lennie and George's dream concrete by providing visual metaphor. In addition, the movie underscores the discrepancy between what George and Lennie have and what they wish to have.

CHAPTER 4

Dream

Images of the real world and dream world, though varied in each genre, function in all three genres as a backdrop for the story. The dream place is the ideal world. It is an icon that Steinbeck uses to illustrate the power of the subconscious to transcend conflict. The dream operates most significantly on two levels: as a form of sublimation in the Freudian sense of the term, because the dream provides a socially acceptable imaginative outlet for the conflict within the human psyche, and as a kind of hypnosis, a tapping of normally unavailable memories and powers of imagination, which induces a decreased level of critical awareness in both George and Lennie. In the novel, Steinbeck illustrates the hypnotic qualities of the dream in dialogue between George and Lennie. Steinbeck describes George's telling of the dreams as rhythmic "as though he had said them many times before. 'Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're pounding their tail on some other ranch'" (15). Lennie, as always, is carried away by the subconscious suggestion "That's right-that's it. Now tell how it is with us" (15). "With us," George says, "it ain't like that. We got a future" (15). And Lennie interrupts. His mind, faulty on the conscious level, most apparent in his slippery memory, seems now energized by contact with a vivid and clear subconscious vision: "But not

us! An' why? Because . . . because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why" (15).

How much influence Steinbeck had on Lewis Milestone's movie version or Eugene Solow's script of Of Mice and Men is difficult to assess; however, it may be assumed that it was extensive both directly and indirectly. Joseph Millichap noted the indirect influence the novel had on Milestone's work, and he asserted that, "Milestone's filmic success was occasioned by Steinbeck's original novel" (26). In addition, Steinbeck himself made several references to the fact that the power of the story exists quite independent of the genre. The indirect influence of the story on its adaptations is evident in Steinbeck's letter written to people involved in the adaptation of the novel into musical. Steinbeck, assuring them that the off-Broadway musical would succeed as had both the novel and play before it, suggested that: "the emotion is in the situation" (Letters, 564).

Steinbeck's direct influence, on the other hand, is more difficult to assess; however, it is documented that Eugene Solow planned at least a week of work with Steinbeck in Steinbeck's Pacific Grove home to go over Solow's script (Letters). Morsberger notes: "The screenplay by Eugene Solow, approved by Steinbeck, is faithful to the sources but supplements the play with details taken from the book" (Hayashi, 259).

Steinbeck translates the dream image into drama and film with much the same effect. It is one of the essential "givens" in the story. The technical problems imposed by

shifting from novel to drama, to film, was not a major concern for Steinbeck. His comment supports the idea that the essential energy of the story exists in a place which is not affected by translation between genres. The energy exists in George and Lennie's dream.

CHAPTER 5

Garden Paradise

George and Lennie's dream is an image of the garden/paradise, an icon in the Jungian sense because their dream represents Everyman's dream. It parallels the dream of the children of Israel when they wandered in the wilderness. Myths of paradise exist in all cultures, and they have existed since recorded history. The garden/paradise image represents the need for security and a sense of place, and Steinbeck uses this image with purpose.

The novelist provides an image of the real ranch that is antithetical to the dream ranch, yet both have crops, cows, chickens, and a dog or two. While the dream place is idyllic--and removed from all distasteful worldly concern like Eden before the fall--the ranch is far from paradise. The ranch is primarily a place of evil, a fact that did not escape Lennie: "I don't like this place George. This ain't no good place. I wanna get outa here" (36). George, recognizing the truth of Lennie's observation, responds by explaining the necessity of their being there: "We gotta keep it till we get a stake. We can't help it, Lennie. We'll get out jus' as soon as we can. I don't like it no better than you do" (36). Steinbeck's use of the ranch, then, works to reinforce the power of George and Lennie's dream by giving their dream a concrete antithesis.

For the drama, variation occurs in that Steinbeck as playwright demands that the audience imaginatively establishes this antithetical relationship between paradise

and cruel reality. The play, as artistic vehicle, does not allow narrative description, and therefore depends on some other factor to communicate its ideas. Detailed descriptions of the ranch, which suggest that the ranch is an evil parallel to George and Lennie's dream, are suggested by props and sound effects which overlay the theme of forced work with pleasure. For example, when the ranchhands come in at noon to eat, the story directions call for "sounds of the teams coming in from the fields, jingling of harness, croak of heavy laden axles, men talking to and cussing the horses. The crack of a whip and from a distance a voice calling" (654).

A description of Crook's room also makes use of a real-world scene which is overlaid with sound effect:

The room of the stable buck, a lean-to off the barn. There is a plank door upstage center; a small square window center right. On one side of the door a leather working bench with tools racked behind it, and on the others racks with broken and partly mended harness, collars, hames, traces, etc. At left upstage Crook's bunk. Over it two shelves. On one a great number of books and a big alarm clock. In the corner right upstage a single barreled shotgun and on the floor beside it a pair of rubber boots. . . . The entrance leads into the barn proper. From that direction and during the whole scene come the sounds of horses eating, stamping, jingling their halter chains and now and

then whinnying. (668)

At the beginning of Act 3, Scene 1, sound direction overlays the scenic details: "One end of a great barn. Backstage the hay slopes up sharply against the wall. High in the upstage wall is a large hay window. On each side are seen the hay racks, behind which are the stalls with the horses in them. Throughout this scene the horses can be heard in their stalls, rattling their halter chains and chewing at the hay" (673). The opening of the climactic scene provides similar images: "In the barn there is a feeling of quiet and humming and lazy warmth. Curtain rises on Lennie sitting in the hay" (673).

The scene parallels the manger scene at Christ's birth, but the manger scene in Of Mice and Men is fraught with shadow. Instead of the joyous birth of Christ, Steinbeck contrasts the death of Lennie's puppy and the death of Mae; instead of a virgin Mary, Steinbeck provides Mae, who is Mary's antithesis; instead of salvation of humanity which the Christ child's death would one day provide, Steinbeck orchestrates Lennie's singularly brutal salvation through Lennie's own death; instead of a mood of hope, Steinbeck's manger scene suggests spiritual damnation and turmoil. As Lennie leaves the barn after killing Mae, stage directions say: "He puts the [dead] pup under his coat, creeps to the barn wall and peers out between the cracks and then he creeps around to the end of the manger and disappears" (676). And after: "For a moment the stage is absolutely silent. Then the horses stamp on the other side of the feeding rack. The

halter chains clink and from outside men's voices come loud and clear" (676).

In the dramatic version, we are first introduced to the dream when the play opens at the river. George repeats the dream "rhythmically, as though he had said it many times before" (648). "Guys like us that work on ranches is the loneliest guys in the world . . . " (648). Stage directions prompt George to deliver these lines as if he is "almost chanting" (648). "With us it ain't like that," George says, "we got a future" (648).

George continues: "Some day we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house, and a couple of acres and a cow and some pigs and. . . . "

"And live off the fat of the land!" interrupts Lennie, "And have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about the rain in the winter . . . and about the stove and how thick the cream is on the milk, you can hardly cut it. Tell about that George!" (648).

George states the basic conflict between the dream and the real world as he and Lennie lie down to sleep beside the river: "Jesus, you feel free when you ain't got a job--if you ain't hungry" (649). In more direct terms: ranch work is, for Lennie and George, a necessary, irreconcilable evil.

The dream approaches a concrete form in Act 2, Scene 1 when Candy, mourning his dog's death, overhears Lennie and George talking about their place: "You know where there is a place like that? . . . How much they want for a place like that?" After Candy offers to contribute three hundred and

forty of the six hundred dollars needed to buy the place, he says: "S'pose I went in with you guys? I ain't much good, but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some. How'd that be?" After thinking about it for a moment George realizes that with Candy's money and the money he and Lennie would get that month from their work on the ranch, the dream would become reality: "We'll do'er! God Damn, we'll fix up that little ole place and we'll go live there" (664-65).

At this point, the dream seems to be a possibility, but the possibility is darkly shadowed by Crooks, whose character acts as a foil for the dream itself. He provides Lennie real-world counsel:

You're nuts. I seen hundreds of men come by on the road and on the ranches, bindles on their back and the same damn thing in their head. . . . And every damn one of 'em is got a little piece of land in his head. And never a goddamn one of 'em gets it. Jus' like heaven. Everybody wants a little piece of land. Nobody never gets to heaven. And nobody gets no land. (670)

At last even Crooks begins to see that the dream is concrete and possible. When Candy enters, he reinforces Lennie's position with Crooks: "I got it all figured out. We can make some real money on them rabbits if we go about it right," says Candy. "You guys is just kiddin' yourselves," Crooks says brutally, but when Candy tells Crooks that they have the money, Crooks is impressed: "You say you got the money?"

I've never seen a guy really do it. I seen guys nearly crazy with loneliness for land, but every time a whorehouse or a blackjack game took it away from 'em." Finally, fully convinced of the concreteness of the dream, Crooks "hesitates then speaks timidly: 'If you guys would want a hand to work for nothin'--just his keep, why I'd come and lend a hand. I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I wanted to'" (671). The playwright has given the dream a concreteness by Crooks's interaction. Through his pessimism and questioning, the audience's pessimism and questioning have found vent.

But the dream dies with Lennie's death at the climax of the play. The script, in Act 3, Scene 2 opens at the river where Lennie is hiding after killing Mae. When George finally arrives, Lennie and George talk at cross purposes for the last time about their dream. Note the meaningful silences, the emotive suggestions, and the dramatic movement indicated by the playwright's stage direction and dialogue in the scene: "George (speaks as though his lips were stiff) . . . Lennie (craftily) 'then tell me like you done before' . . . George (recites again) . . . Lennie (happily) . . . Lennie (triumphantly) . . . George (takes off his hat; shakily) . . . (Lennie turns his head and looks across the river) . . . George (reaches in his side pocket and brings out Carlson's Luger. Hand and gun lie on the ground behind Lennie's back. He stares at the back of Lennie's head at the place where spine and skull are joined) . . . Lennie 'go on!' (George raises the gun, but his

hand shakes and he drops his hand to the ground) . . . Lennie 'Go on! How's it gonna be? We gonna get a little place . . . ' George (thickly) . . . Lennie (giggling with happiness) . . . George (George fires. Lennie crumples; falls behind the brush. The voices of the men in the distance)" (679-80). Thus Steinbeck builds variations of the garden/paradise in the dramatic adaptation according to the strengths of that medium.

The film also has strengths unique to itself. Film takes advantage of its ability to provide large imagistic contexts and instantaneously overlays these with dialogue. The garden paradise is portrayed by large vistas as the wagons come in after harvest. There are also carefully tended grape vines and mounds of plentiful victuals on the long table. Natural scenes join the narrative to the land and in this way the audience becomes empathetic with the characters who strive to possess their own, small share of the good earth.

In the screen adaptation, the garden paradise is revealed through simultaneous use of image and sound, but also, because film has access to this simultaneity, it can incorporate numerous original images not found in either the novel or the play. The effect of simultaneity is to create drama and to reinforce theme. It was Lewis Millichap who noted that Steinbeck, "in both novel and play . . . brings the other characters, including the boss, into the bunkhouse for the interview." On the other hand, "Milestone has the other characters presented outside, in the office, or

against the natural backgrounds of ranch activity. Crooks, the black cripple who serves as stablebuck, limps by; Curly's wife plays in the barn with her fleecy puppy; Slim, the muleskinner, drives by with his twelve-mule team." Millichap explains further that "the director builds tension by inventing a fist fight between Curley and Whit, a young ranch hand, then moving to direct confrontations of Curley with Slim, George, and Lennie" (20). In this way, the camera, like the novel, imitates human perception: eye turning to an unending sequence of events and ear simultaneously perceiving sounds.

CHAPTER 6

Images of Seasons

Steinbeck sets an autumnal mood for his novel, but he juxtaposes this image with the thought of winter and a promise of spring: "willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of winter flooding" (1).

The autumnal mood suggests impending decay, loss of vitality, and coming impotence. But it also celebrates the harvest, pointing back to the Dionysian ideas of celebration and sacrifice to the earth gods.

The Boss, who embodies the essence of the ranch, operates by greed and rules with an iron fist. Instead of being in a celebratory harvest mood, the Boss is accusatory and self-serving. The Boss provides the antithesis of the joy of harvest; his mood is not one of thanksgiving and of plenty but of anger and self-service: "'I wrote Murray and Ready I wanted two men this morning. You got your work slips?' George reached into his pocket and produced the slips and handed them to the boss. 'It wasn't Murray and Ready's fault. Says right here you was to be here for work this morning'" (23). After the boss complains about having to send out his grain wagons two men short, he added: "But don't try to put nothing over, 'cause you can't get away with nothing. I seen wise guys before" (25). Here, Steinbeck suggests a harvest of doom.

Steinbeck provides, as well, a foreboding autumnal mood through images of "crisp sycamore leaves" which have newly

fallen. These leaves symbolize impending decay; however, a thing must have lived in order to decay. There is a link then between the living world and the decaying world. Steinbeck underscores the link in several scenes by associating dead and dying leaves with aspects of the living world. "On the sandy bank under the trees, leaves lie deep and so crisp that a lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them" (1). Again, in the opening scene, the withering leaves are linked with the living world to suggest darkness and torridity yet sound and motion: "Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving among the leaves" (2). With decaying leaves, Steinbeck depicts autumn's tapestry: a time woven with threads of the decay, yet a time woven with fabric of living.

In the dramatic version Steinbeck as playwright incorporates the idea of the autumnal mood with a variation. Stage directions suggest the autumnal scene, but the suggestion is subtle: "The stage is lit by a setting sun. . . . The stage is covered with dry leaves" (644), but here too, Steinbeck suggests the connection of both characteristics of the autumn (impending decay and life) with the use of sound effects. In the distance, birds call and then take flight (644).

Steinbeck conveys the mood of harvest in the drama with similar understatement. The mention of the fields full of harvestable barley suffices to denote the harvest itself. The boss betrays his self-serving temperament in a conversation which closely parallels the novel. "The Boss

was expecting you last night," says Candy, "He was sore as hell when you wasn't here to go out this morning" (649).

One element in the drama serves to complicate the Boss's character. The Boss, Steinbeck tells us, is a man who is trapped in his position as officiator of the harvest. The following dialogue and stage directions are unique to the play and serve to cast a shadow on the harvest:

(Up to this time the Boss has been full of business. He has been calm and suspicious. In the following lines he relaxes, but gradually, as though he wanted to talk but felt always the burden of his position. He turns toward the door, but hesitates and allows a little warmth into his manner). Been on the road long?

George: (obviously on guard). We was three days in 'Frisco lookin' at the boards.

Boss: (with heavy jocularly). Didn't go to no night clubs, I s'pose?

George: (stiffly). We was lookin' for a job.

Boss: (attempting to be friendly). That's a great town if you got a little jack, Frisco.

George: (refusing to be drawn in). We didn't have no jack for nothing like that.

Boss: (realizes there is no contact to establish; grows rigid with his position again). Go out with the grain teams after dinner. When my hands work hard they get pie and when they loaf they bounce

down the road on their can. You ask anybody about me. (He turns and walks out of bunkhouse). (652)

Conditions at the ranch do not improve. Rather they worsen. In rapid succession Steinbeck paints the autumnal mood of the ranch by the warped characters who will participate in the season's harvest: Curley is introduced with high-heeled western riding boots (not work boots), a sour disposition, and a left-hand glove full of Vaseline to keep his skin soft for his wife (652-54); Curly's wife, Mae, is introduced as an obvious coquette as she "puts her hands behind her back and leans against the door frame so that her body is thrown forward" (655) in exaggerated sensuality; an obese Carlson takes delight in retelling the story of his huge Airedale that had impregnated a neighbor's "little white floozy dog," leaving the impression that the incident caused extreme physical pain to the bitch and mental anguish to her owner: "Christ Almighty," Carlson remembers the man saying, "this morning she slang a litter of Shetland ponies . . . " (657).

In the film, the image of autumn is graphic. Millichap explains how the camera is used to advantage:

Milestone draws back for distanced shots which locate the characters in the context of the ranch and the natural world. He holds the shots and lets the action play in front of the camera; farm wagons criss-cross in right-left, left-right lines of movement--a sort of folk ballet which gives a lively feeling to the natural life. Against this

backdrop we see Lennie's brute strength, Mae's loneliness, and Curly's brutality; only Slim, the muleskinner and, to some extent, his new friend, George, know how to harness nature in an orderly way. (21)

Not only does Milestone offer an image of autumn that is contrastingly filled with life images, but he also establishes a mood which is much more dramatic in terms of movement.

At its essential core, the autumnal mood affects all people universally, and autumn strikes archetypal cords in the movie viewer. As was noted by Marshall McLuhan, "Weather is that medium which involves all people equally" (Understanding, 298). Herein lies the success of the film.

CHAPTER 7

Chiaroscuro

Chiaroscuro, the pictorial play of light and dark, black and white, day and night, is a particularly notable technical device which translates consistently through all treatments of Of Mice and Men.

Steinbeck uses chiaroscuro in the opening scene by the river in the odd half-light of dusk. Light shifts in Chapter 2 to the intense full light of mid-day: "The sunshine lay in a thin line under the window" (41). This scene is reinforced with auditory description, which alternates between sound and silence: "from a distance there could be heard a rattle of dishes" (41). It seems to represent the auditory equivalent of chiaroscuro. At the beginning of chapter 3, the scene shifts from daylight to an eerie half-light of "evening brightness showing through the windows of the bunkhouse, inside it was dusk" (42) and this chiaroscuro image is followed by alternating sound elements: "Through the open door came the thuds and occasional clangs of a horseshoe game, and now and then the sound of voices raised in approval or derision" (42). As the scene progresses toward night, Carlson "came out of the darkening yard. He walked to the other end of the bunk house and turned on the second shaded light. 'Darker'n hell in here,' he said" (48). In this scene, Steinbeck pairs visual chiaroscuro techniques with smell, "He stopped and sniffed the air, and still sniffing, looked down at the old dog. 'God almighty that dog stinks. Get him out here, Candy! I don't know nothing that stinks as

bad as an old dog'" (48). Steinbeck contrasts Carlson's reaction with Candy's, who "rolled to the edge of his bunk . . . patted the ancient dog, and apologized, 'I been around him so much I never notice how he stinks'" (49).

In the drama, the playwright varies chiaroscuro, but harmonizes it with auditory imagery. In Act 1, Scene 1, "The stage is lit by a setting sun" (644), and dogs bark in the background, quail call, and sparrows sing. At the end of that scene, the playwright directs, "the light dies slowly out of the fire until only the faces of the two men can be seen" (649), and as Lennie and George talk, the growing darkness and silence are enhanced by "a night owl [which is] heard from far off" followed by the sounds of a coyote howling and ranch dogs barking. The following scene opens in the broad daylight, and props reinforce the dark and light motif. The "sun is streaking through the windows" (649), "there is a hanging light from the ceiling over the table" (649). Here Steinbeck subtly plays sound against this light-filled backdrop. "Only the ticking of many alarm clocks is heard" (649).

In the film, the images of light and darkness vary to become natural signs or icons. Milestone uses the play of light and dark images of flickering firelight on the faces of Lennie and George to interpret the eerie mood as George and Lennie prepare beans, accompanied by the hollow sound of the can being cut and the unpredictable crackle of the fire. In the firelight George and Lennie eat beans in a primordial atmosphere. Back lighting provides an emotional framework to

make the characters appear as transparent as the dream they talk about. The director utilizes the backlight shining through the smoke of George's cigarette as he talks to Lennie about the dream, the farm, and the rabbits. The transitory nature of the dream spins within the ephemeral nature of light and dark, hope and despair, garden dream and forest reality.

Steinbeck allows for intricate interplays of half-light in the times of dusk, but in the novel and more so in the play, description is, of necessity, sparse. In the film, economy is not the issue. The ambiguity of those half-light moments is enlarged by the director, for film can handle back lighting and low light situations to reinforce the setting with a simultaneity which is difficult for the novel to achieve. Milestone uses the power of film to reinforce Steinbeck's artistic vision, for Milestone provides numerous plays of light and dark, shifting and changing the mood of any given scene.

CHAPTER 8

Water

Steinbeck uses water to symbolize a life force, but one that contains potential danger. As the novel opens at the river, George and Lennie drink from the river. As Lennie throws himself down on the ground with abandon, he "drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse. The small man stepped nervously beside him" (3). But George is cautious. Water also reflects a potential for death or at least sickness. "Lennie, for God's sakes don't drink so much...you gonna be sick like you was last night'" (3). George is much more cautious when he approaches to drink from the pool. Lennie encourages George to drink: "You drink some George. You take a good big drink" (3). But George is aware of the potential dangers in the water. "'I ain't sure it's good water,' he said 'Looks kinda scummy'" (3). Finally George says in disgust "You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty Lennie" (3).

In addition, water has obvious cleansing properties which are utilized by Steinbeck. After George cautiously drank from the water, "he threw a scoop of water into his face and rubbed it about with his hand, under his chin and around the back of his neck" (4-5). Later, Steinbeck incorporates images of water when the men are coming in from the fields for dinner, and "from the washroom nearby came the sound of running water rattling basins" (36). Again, Carlson seems a character of unwavering evil intent. His appearance

is consistent with his character: a big-stomached man whose "head still dripped water from rubbing and dousing" (38). And later, when George relates the story of the time he told Lennie to jump into the Sacramento River, Steinbeck begins building on the more abstract cleansing property of water--baptism:

"If I tol' him to walk over a cliff, he'd go. That wasn't so damn much fun after a while." George's voice was taking on a tone of confession. "Tell you what made me stop that. One day a bunch of guys was standin' around up on the Sacramento River. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turns to Lennie an' says, 'Jump in.' An' he jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke. He damn near drowned before we could get him. An' he was so damn nice to me for pullin' him out. Clean forgot I told him to jump in. Well, I ain't done nothing like that no more." (44)

The drama differs from the novel because it understates the symbolic overtones of water. For the audience, the stage setting is by necessity limited. Broad sweeping descriptions bulked-up by compact metaphor and panoramic views of the Salinas River cannot transfer to the play. Any symbolic suggestion inherent in water exists solely by implication, so Steinbeck's stage directions for the river scene are sparse and to the point: "A sandy bank of the Salinas River" (644). Steinbeck begins the drama with George and Lennie drinking at the river. George is cautious, while

Lennie drinks with wanton abandonment. Similar to the novel, George cleanses himself for "he throws a scoop of water into his face and rubs it around with his hand, pushes himself back." Steinbeck adds a detail which reinforces the nurturing quality of water, for stage directions order George to "embrace his knees." Thereafter, Lennie, watching him, "imitates him in every detail" (644).

In the film, the pool at the river is similar to the one described in the novel. It is characterized through the action and the dialogue to be both life-giving and potentially dangerous. However, the pool is also seen as a representation of the larger world in miniature. Milestone's river scene varies somewhat, but he is careful to include numerous animals: cautious deer, foreboding crows, fearful rabbits, to convey the idea that Steinbeck's symbolic water is a source of life for the natural ecosystem. Other dramatic variations include a tight focus on the water itself. For example, when George stoops at the pool to drink, he pushes back floating bits of duck-weed, thereby creating rings on the surface of the water which the camera tracks for a moment until the rings reach a floating lily pad. Milestone seems to offer this image as a symbolic illustration of the ecological microcosm of the river. Water also takes on cleansing properties in the film. The scene at the outdoor washhouse, a scene Milestone adds to the film, uses dialogue that Steinbeck set in the bunkhouse. In this scene George and Slim talk about the time that George told Lennie to jump into the Sacramento River. George's

figurative cleansing takes on both symbolic and ironic dimensions as he walks away from the washhouse naked to the waist, clean and wet.

In the film Carlson is not shown wet from his recent scrubbing before the noon meal, perhaps to reinforce Carlson's antagonistic character, and the film loses nothing in omitting this detail. In keeping with Milestone's assumed license to interpret scenes, other variations on the theme of water occur.

Possibly the most striking variation on cleansing by water occurs at the climax of the film in which Lennie, after being fatally shot by his friend George, falls from the log into the river. In this scene, Milestone follows Steinbeck's cue that water is an image of life, of cleansing, and of death. Milestone's image of Lennie achieving his final "baptism by immersion" symbolically admits him to membership in the universal church. The final scene juxtaposes the sorrow of death with the celebration of baptism to parallel the spirit of the autumnal harvest.

CHAPTER 9

Character

Character drives the action, and Steinbeck provides George, who is the symbolic Everyman forced into the role of hero. He confronts a major conflict and reacts to it. Steinbeck identifies George as hero in a letter to Annie Laurie Williams (Letters, 563), and he describes George's problem in symbolic human terms: "Everyone in the world has a dream he knows can't come off but he spends his life hoping it may. This is at once the sadness, the greatness and the triumph of our species." So complex is the idea of an illusory dream in Of Mice and Men that the question of whether or not Lennie and George will achieve their dream becomes ensnared in the web of social order, compassion, and the dream itself. Steinbeck explains George's feelings about shooting Lennie: " . . . in hopelessness--George is able to rise to greatness--to kill his friend to save him. George is a hero and only heroes are worth writing about" (Letters, 563). Steinbeck's characterization of George as hero is essential to the novel, drama, and movie; however, each genre demonstrates unique treatment. Fundamental to George as hero are non-heroic characters: Curly, the Boss, Crooks, Candy, and Carlson. Each of these antagonists contributes to the heroic stature of George, because each stands in direct opposition to him.

Steinbeck introduces George accompanied by Lennie:

Two men emerged from the path . . . they walked in a single file . . . and even in the open one stayed

behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp strong features. Every part of him was defined: small strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides but hung loosely. (2)

Lennie is clearly characterized as a beast. Hence, Lennie follows George, much as a pack animal follows the man pulling his lead or as man's carnal nature follows the reasoning nature. Steinbeck characterizes Lennie in terms of animal imagery: he "drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse" (3). "Lennie dabbled his big paw in the water and wiggled his fingers . . . " (3). "Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again. George snapped his fingers sharply, and at the sound Lennie laid the mouse in his hand" (9). Steinbeck thematically links only Lennie in this way with the animal world, but not others.

Steinbeck's descriptions of the other characters, however, are clear and concrete. Curley is introduced as "a thin young man with tightly curled hair, a single glove on

his left hand, and high heeled boots" (27). His antagonistic mood is evident when he "glanced coldly at George and then at Lennie. His arms gradually bent at the elbows and his hands closed into fists. He stiffened and went into a slight crouch. His glance was at once calculating and pugnacious" (28). The anger in his temperament is not completely evident until the action reveals his character through the dialogue with George and Lennie:

"You the new guys the old man was waitin' for?"

"We jus come in," said George.

"Let the big guy talk."

Lennie twisted with embarrassment.

George said, "S'pose he don't want to talk?"

Curley lashed his body around. "By christ, he's gotta talk when he's spoke to. What the hell are you gettin' into it for?"

"We travel together," said George coldly. (28)

A pattern of first giving objective description followed by dialogue is consistent throughout the novel. It is a pattern similar to the camera eye taking in the big picture, then focusing in close as the characters begin to speak. This pattern gives character, or the action, a context which is visual. Through dialogue, rather than through further narrative, Steinbeck reveals character.

In the drama, variation occurs because description does not exist. George's heroic mold is still apparent. In the stage directions, Steinbeck focuses on the bare essentials of

character description: "Two figures are seen entering the stage in single file, with George, the short man, coming in ahead of Lennie. Both men are carrying blanket rolls" (655). In this way the primary focus of the novel's introductory passage is reduced to two elements: the leader/follower relationship between Lennie and George, and the nomadic nature of their life as suggested by their bed rolls. Actors dealing with the script then must "discover" the content of character in the play's dialogue and stage directions and thence creatively manufacture the character through verbal speech and physical action.

The drama varies in other important ways as well. Dramatic convention prevents the highly emotive passage occurring at the climax of the novel in which Lennie hallucinates in a vision of his Aunt Clara. In this scene, "from out of Lennie's head there came a little woman. She wore thick bull's-eye glasses and she wore a huge gingham apron . . . when she spoke, it was in Lennie's voice. 'I tol' you an' tol' you,' she said. 'I tol' you, Min' George because he's such a nice fella an' good to you. But you don't never take no care. You do bad things'" (111).

Because hallucination is nearly impossible to frame in dramatic presentation, Steinbeck dispenses with the vision of the gigantic rabbit which "sat on its haunches in front of him, and wagged its ears and crinkled its nose at him" (112). A lengthy quote from the novel will illustrate the complexity of this scene. Steinbeck describes the imagined rabbit as "coming out of Lennie's head" and speaking in

Lennie's voice:

"Tend rabbits," it said scornfully. "You ain't worth a greased jack-pin to ram you into hell. Christ knows George done everything he could to jack you outa the sewer, but it don't do no good. If you think George gonna let you tend rabbits, you're even crazier'n usual. He ain't. He's gonna beat hell outa you with a stick, that's what he's gonna do."

Now Lennie retorted belligerently, "He ain't neither. George won't do nothing like that. I've knew George since--I forget when--and he ain't never raised his han' to me with a stick. He's nice to me. He ain't gonna be mean."

"Well, he's sick of you," said the rabbit. "He's gonna beat hell outa you an' then go away an' leave you."

"He won't," Lennie cried frantically. "He won't do nothing like that. I know George. Me an' him travels together."

But the rabbit repeated softly over and over, "He gonna leave you, ya crazy bastard. He gonna leave ya all alone. He gonna leave ya, crazy bastard." (112)

The significance of this hallucinatory dream imagery is noted by Joan Steele in her article "A Century of Idiots: Barnaby Rudge and Of Mice and Men." Steele explains that Lennie's dream image is catastrophic:

Lennie's fixation arises from the farthest depths of his mind in the form of a gigantic rabbit, for it is the symbol of the utopian farm, made monstrous in size and cruel in speech. It sneers and grins at Lennie and teases him, while, because it speaks in his own voice, it makes Lennie himself appear to be dream-like and visionary. The dream rabbit's berating of Lennie prepares the reader for the catastrophe, for when one's most cherished dream turns upon one, it is indeed the death of hope. (Quarterly, 13)

This hallucinatory passage, difficult to handle coherently in the dramatic medium, would be equally difficult to handle in film. Hence, Milestone chooses, as did Steinbeck in his play, to exclude this passage.

Film, however, provides a more colorful canvas for description than either novel or play by its capability to relate objective physical description simultaneous with dialogue and action. This does not alter the major energy of the story: Goerge's heroic struggle. Rather, film's use of objective material enhances George's struggle. The novel, being linear in nature, isolates each element much as beads are isolated from one another on a necklace. The reader sees in succession only. Drama, on the other hand, is an organic, moving process, but it loses the power of the novel's narrative descriptions. Not so with film. Film provides scene, setting, and all physical descriptions as a mosaic does--simultaneously. Film, then, excels in such scenes as

the dinner at the ranchhouse in which Curley and the Boss violently stare at their bowls without a word, slurping down milk-soaked apple pie while in the cook-shack the ranch hands, George and Lennie, with good humor, sit down to a long table overflowing with wholesome food. Since the film can give no physical description per se, and relies on the viewer to see the description, film compensates by suggesting an inherent freshness by interpolating scenes of men coming from the wash house clean and wholesomely tired from their work.

The film has been criticized because it loses some of its inherent power when it varies to satisfy conventions of good taste. One example of note is that in both the novel and the play, George reprimands Lennie for carrying a mouse in his pocket to the river camp. According to Morsberger, "apparently to keep women in the audience from being terrified by a mouse the film replaces Lennie's dead mouse with a bird" (qtd. in Hayashi, 260). Whether to avoid terrifying women or not, certainly this variation dilutes Steinbeck's impact. Bird does not echo the theme of the title Of Mice and Men; equally important, bird does not in its nature suggest the meekness and softness inherent in the image of mouse. As Franklin Court puts it, "the mouse symbolizes the theme of innocence and frailty destroyed that pervades the play" (qtd. in Hayashi, 159).

In addition to this change in the film, the description in the novel of Curley's "one gloved left hand" suggests Curley's vanity and focuses the reader's attention on Curley's superficial approach to his world. Since Curley

wears two gloves in the film, another important thematic focal point is lost for little apparent reason.

Other film variations of character include the scene in which Lennie immerses his face in the water to drink. In the film, the immersion is more of a face-wetting than the complete soaking described in the novel. In the novel, Steinbeck describes the scene in this way: "Lennie dipped his whole head under, hat and all, and then sat up on the bank and his hat dripped down on his blue coat and ran down his back" (3). The key phrases here, "whole head" and "hat and all," serve to illustrate Lennie's total immersion and total absorption in the activity of drinking. Lennie ignores normal cautions taken for granted by the average person. The novel is very clear on this issue. The idea of total immersion in an odd activity characterizes Lennie as different from the reader. In passing over this character description, the film misses an opportunity to reveal Lennie's character through action. The film, however, discovers other descriptive potentials by adding new images.

The film contains a scene in which Candy is figuring the profit of raising rabbits on the little place. Oddly, Candy keeps his records on a paper bag which covers his injured hand. Symbolic in nature, the image of the bag, with all of its potential to become their dream, is reminiscent of the receptivity of the womb. The irony of this is that Candy completes the symbolic sexual union by inserting his maimed hand, which is an impotent organ. The symbol of infertility foreshadows the ultimate destruction of the dream while it

describes one dimension of Candy's personality.

The film varies other human images as well. Slim's image, for example, develops as an illuminating personage who refuses to give light to Carlson's proposal to kill Candy's dog. After Carlson has led the old dog out the door on a leash, the ranch hands wait: George and Whit vainly try to concentrate on a card game, Candy lies dejectedly staring, George paces, and Slim takes a kerosene lamp down from its shelf as if to light it. Then, as if on second thought, Slim sets the lamp back on its shelf--unlit. Slim's action symbolically underscores his attitude about the killing of the dog. Though Slim ultimately arbitrates the shooting of the dog when he is forced to do so by the ultimatum proposed by Carlson, Slim never agrees with Carlson's motivation. Slim chooses not to light the lamp nor to illuminate the situation. Milestone takes Steinbeck's cue that motivation in "mercy killing" is the essence of determining the ethics of euthanasia. In short, euthanasia principally has two motivations: compassion or self-interest. This thematic issue is not so strongly illustrated in the novel nor could it have been, for a description of this sort--Slim lifting a lamp from its shelf then deciding not to light it--would have come off as a rather contrived bit of literary symbolism. In film, however, juxtaposed with the overlaping dialogue, this symbolic description works effectively.

CHAPTER 10

Summary and Conclusion

Steinbeck was a product of times which were rapidly changing by the influences of the evolving film and television mediums. While his writing reflects a successful understanding of the new mediums from a technical point-of-view, his writing also reveals an occupation with folklore, myth, legend, and literature. That is, he applied the American myth to the new technology. Steinbeck says:

If a writer likes to write, he will find satisfaction in endless experiment with his medium. He will improvise techniques, arrangements of scenes, rhythms of words, and rhythms of thought. He will constantly investigate and try combinations new to him, sometimes utilizing an old method for a new idea and vice versa. Some of his experiments will inevitably be unsuccessful, but he must try them anyway if his interest be alive (qtd. in Tedlock, 47).

Film and television would in time become major tools in shaping American myth. In order to portray his mythic world accurately, Steinbeck's new literature experimented with the evolving film and TV mediums. Noted social critic Marshall McLuhan confirms that by 1965, just thirty years later, American society had metamorphosed into a unique amalgamation which Steinbeck's artistic approach prophesied: "The young student today grows up in an electrically configured world.

It is a world not of wheels but of circuits, not of fragments but of integral patterns. The student today lives mythically and in depth" (Understanding, vii).

As early as 1933, Steinbeck was aware of his own drift toward fable and myth. In a letter to Carl Williamson Steinbeck writes in his characteristically self-deprecating tone:

I don't think you will like my late work. It leaves realism farther and farther behind. I never had much ability for nor faith nor belief in realism. It is just a form of fantasy as nearly as I could figure. Boileau was a wiser man than Mencken. The festered characters of Faulkner are not very interesting to me unless their festers are heroic. This may be silly but it is what I am. There are streams in man more profound and dark and strong than the libido of Freud. Jung's libido is closer but still inadequate. (Letters, 87)

Mythic structures and the Jungian idea of universal archetypes preoccupied Steinbeck throughout his career. For Steinbeck the scenes of primeval innocence could portray newly emerging social realities of the 1930's, metaphorically parallel to primordial images of water, garden, autumn and so forth. Steinbeck to his credit recognized that the emerging myth was intrinsically tied to the evolving film medium of the 1930's. The significance of his contribution must not be overlooked, for he carried to film the power of his novel. Millichap observes:

Steinbeck's best works translate smoothly to the screen because they are essentially filmic, drawing their inspiration from the realistic tradition of documentary photography and film, they in turn provided inspiration for filmic works in the same mode. (5)

Steinbeck contends "Everything impinges on everything else, often into radially different systems" (Sea, 142). This statement implies that things begin somewhere else. So it is that Of Mice and Men is the artistic endeavor upon which Steinbeck's later work impinges. He adds, "No one thing ever merges gradually into anything else; the steps are discontinuous, but often so very minute as to seem truly continuous" (Sea, 142).

The power of Steinbeck's work is that it walks a transitory line between genres without crucifying itself for the sake of any singular form. Steinbeck's work exists on a temporal edge seemingly without ill-effect. To succeed in this way is such an unusual phenomenon that it disconcerts literary critics who assume that a writer cannot succeed in more than one genre with the same work. These critics hold that there is an organic nature which makes the story either wholly novel, wholly drama, or wholly film, but never all. Writers who attempt to cross genres, it is thought, universally fail. Steinbeck's success is a testament to his genius.

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