

MODERN MAN
AS PORTRAYED IN THE WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: THE IMPORTANCE OF A "WHY"	5
A. The necessity of a "why" as seen in Steinbeck	6
B. The cause of the loss of "why" in modern times	16
CHAPTER II: THE CONDITION OF MODERN MAN AS SEEN IN STEINBECK	21
A. The concern for materialism	22
B. The effect of materialism on man....	23
C. The mechanization of the individual.	35
D. Conformity and sameness	44
CHAPTER III: THE EFFECT OF MODERNIZATION ON MAN'S MIND	55
A. An impersonal world	56
B. The impersonal world as seen in Steinbeck	56
C. The loss of communication	62
D. Rejection, isolation	63
E. The generation gap	64

	page
F. The cause of the loss of communication..	67
G. Loneliness	71
CHAPTER IV: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INNER-SELF,.....	83
A. Steinbeck's questions on the value of modern progress	83
B. The conflict between science and the inner nature of man	86
C. Man's need for spiritual security ..	90
D. Steinbeck's concern with religion ..	96
E. The feeling of Oneness	98
F. Steinbeck's solution	99
G. Steinbeck's faith in humanity	100
CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE RELEVANCE TO THE THAI SITUATION	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
VITA	109

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ชื่อ

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แผนกวิชา ภาษาอังกฤษ

ปีการศึกษา

๒๕๑๓



บทคัดย่อ

จอห์น สโตน์ เบ็ก เป็นนักเขียนวิจารณ์สังคมชาวอเมริกันที่มีชื่อเสียง
นวนิยายของเขาส่วนมากเกี่ยวกับปัญหาของชนชั้นที่ไม่สำคัญ ของผู้ซึ่งไม่ได้รับ
การศึกษา และผู้ที่เข้ากับสังคมไม่ได้ วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้จำแนกและวิเคราะห์
ปัญหาทางด้านสังคมในยุคปัจจุบันซึ่งพบจากงานของสโตน์ เบ็ก พร้อมกับเน้น
ให้เห็นถึงปัญหาบางอย่างซึ่ง เป็นผลสะท้อนมาจากความก้าวหน้าสมัยใหม่ซึ่งมี
อิทธิพลทางด้านจิตใจ ตัวอย่างเช่น การให้ความสนใจทางด้านวัตถุมากกว่า
บุคคล การที่คนมีชีวิตอย่าง เครื่องจักร โลกที่ต่างคนต่างอยู่ ความไม่เข้าใจ
กันระหว่างคนต่างวัย ความอ้างว้างว้าเหว และการละทิ้งคุณค่าทางด้านจิตใจ

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Introduction

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules which have come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward; yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that, for them, it is customary, not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of modern spirit. The modern spirit is now awake almost everywhere... 1



Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold made this observation of his society a century ago; what he said is even more pertinent today. Civilization has always advanced regardless of one's desire and ability for adjustment but never as rapidly as in this century. Whether wanted or not changes must come. As Arnold warned, man's life must indeed be adapted to the complexity and the quickened pace of the modern "system." Never in the history of man has change been so rapid and revolutionary as in the twentieth century. The change has increased social problems and produced a crisis of adjustment in the life of the individual.

John Steinbeck, an American author in the twentieth century, deals with the problems of man and society in modern times. He rarely uses big cities as background material in

¹Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Brace & World, Inc., 1942), p.1.

his novels. The situations he presents to the reader usually take place in small towns or in rural areas, as his concentration is on simplicity and naturalness. His heroes are small people or the misfits who cannot cope with the rapid change. Steinbeck stresses the importance of society by treating it much the same as Sinclair Lewis does in Main Street - as a character with interests and attitudes of its own. This personification of society can be found in many of his novels such as Of Mice and Men, The Pearl, The Grapes of Wrath. It is presented as being generally intolerant and having no sympathy for the individual or his problems.

His sympathies always go out to the oppressed, the misfits, and the distressed; he likes to contrast the simple joys of life with the brutal and cynical craving for money. But in him we find the American temperament also expressed in his great feeling for nature, for the tilled soil, the waste land, the mountains and the ocean coasts, all an inexhaustible source of inspiration to Steinbeck in the midst of, and beyond, the world of human beings. ²

Some critics have tried to classify Steinbeck's works and to give a certain definition to them. Though Steinbeck deals with social problems and the oppressed we cannot say definitely that he is a proletarian writer as he does not write only about social protest. In his many novels, we find experiments with different themes. Peter Lisca in his critique

²From the announcement of the Swedish Academy in awarding the 1962 Nobel Prize for literature to John Steinbeck.

The Wide World of John Steinbeck classifies Steinbeck's works since his first novel, Cup of Gold written in 1929 to The Wayward Bus (1947) into three groups: social protest (In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath); quaint and picturesque comedy (Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row); simple rural life (The Pastures of Heaven, The Long Valley, The Pearl, The Red Pony); but Cup of Gold, To A God Unknown and The Wayward Bus do not really fit easily into these three groups. Since it is not easy to categorize John Steinbeck's works, some critics feel he is inconsistent. The point is that one cannot say that he is this or that because he is both this and that. Duality is found in his works; he tries to present both sides and give no judgement. Many aspects of life and ideas are presented in his works such as his non-teleological thinking,³ his ideas about illusion and mob psychology.

This thesis does not try to analyse each of Steinbeck's works and his style of writing as literary achievements but to analyse and relate the problems of modern man and Steinbeck's attitude toward them as developed throughout his long literary career. These problems are those that have effects on man the individual and human relationships such as loss of communication, materialism, loneliness, mechanization and the mass attitude of society itself. Steinbeck's ideas about

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Steinbeck explains his non-teleological thinking in Sea of Cortez that it "...concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually is - attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why.

modernization and its effect on the individual are clearly stated especially in his non-fiction writing. In East of Eden, for example, he gives his attitude about modern times and his nostalgia for the old days when the world had not lost its sweetness and simplicity.

You can see how this book has reached a great boundary that was called 1900 ... the old time, the gay time, the sweet and simple, as though time were young and fearless. Old men who did not know whether they were going to stagger over the boundary of the century looked forward to it with distaste. For the world was changing, and sweetness was gone, and virtue too. Worry had crept on a corroding world, and what was lost - good manners, ease and beauty... 4

The problems confronted in Steinbeck's works while occurring in the U.S. are not peculiar to the U.S. alone. What John Steinbeck presents in his works is symbolic and microcosmic. This thesis will attempt to locate and analyse some of these modern problems and their effects on individuals as seen in Steinbeck's works. There may be some important conclusions for Thai society which is in the process of confronting similar problems today.

⁴John Steinbeck, East of Eden. (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1962), p.111.