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ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS IN JOHN STEINBECK'S NOVELS



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สถาบันวิทยบริการ

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in English

Department of English

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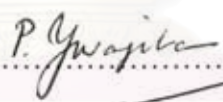
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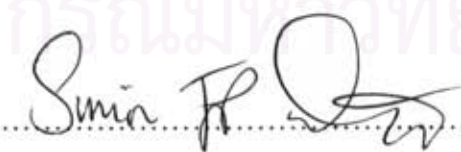
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ศึกษานวนิยายของจอห์น สไตน์เบ็ค (ค.ศ.1902-1968) ด้วยแนวทางการวิเคราะห์วรรณคดีแบบนิเวศสำนึก โดยเลือกวิเคราะห์นวนิยายสามเรื่องที่แสดงภาพความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมนุษย์กับธรรมชาติ ได้แก่ To a God Unknown (ค.ศ.1933) The Grapes of Wrath (ค.ศ.1939) และ East of Eden (ค.ศ.1952) โดยเสนอความคิดว่า นิเวศสำนึกที่สไตน์เบ็คนำเสนอ มีลักษณะเป็นแบบองค์รวม ที่เน้นการอยู่ร่วมกันได้อย่างกลมกลืนและเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวของมนุษย์กับโลกธรรมชาติและมนุษย์ในสังคม กล่าวคือ มนุษย์มิได้มีสถานะที่เหนือกว่าทั้งธรรมชาติและเพื่อนมนุษย์ หากแต่มีหน้าที่ในการรับผิดชอบดูแลธรรมชาติและสังคม การตีความนวนิยายเรื่อง To a God Unknown แสดงมุมมองนิเวศสำนึกแบบองค์รวมของนักเขียนที่มีต่อความสัมพันธ์ของมนุษย์กับโลกธรรมชาติและแบบแยกออกจากกันมิได้ รวมไปถึงความมีเอกภาพของมนุษย์ในสังคมในมิติของศาสนาและเพศสถานะ การศึกษานวนิยายเรื่อง The Grapes of Wrath ชี้ให้เห็นผลกระทบจากการขาดจิตสำนึกที่มีต่อสภาวะแวดล้อมอันก่อให้เกิดการเอาเปรียบทั้งธรรมชาติและเพื่อนมนุษย์ เนื่องจากปัญหาสิ่งแวดล้อมและสังคมมีความเกี่ยวข้องโยงใย จึงจำเป็นต้องตระหนักถึงการแก้ปัญหาทั้งสองด้านไปพร้อมกัน นอกจากนี้ การวิเคราะห์นวนิยายเรื่อง East of Eden แสดงให้เห็นว่า รูปแบบของความสัมพันธ์ในครอบครัวมีผลกระทบต่อการที่บุคคลปฏิบัติต่อกันและจิตสำนึกที่มีต่อสภาวะแวดล้อม กล่าวคือ ความแตกแยกในครอบครัวเป็นจุดเริ่มต้นของการทำลายธรรมชาติและผู้อื่น ในทางกลับกัน ความรักและความอบอุ่นในครอบครัวส่งเสริมความเอื้ออาทรต่อเพื่อนมนุษย์และสิ่งแวดล้อม

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ลายมือชื่อนิสิต..... วสินธุ์ นवलศิริ

สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา..... คารินทร์ ประดิษฐทัศนีย์

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WASINRAT NUALSIRI: ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS IN JOHN
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This thesis analyzes the novels of John Steinbeck (1902-1968) from an ecocritical standpoint in order to examine his environmental vision. Focusing on three novels that portray the relationship between humans and nature: To a God Unknown (1933), The Grapes of Wrath (1939), and East of Eden (1952), I argue that his ecological insight is characterized by a quality of wholeness. Steinbeck's ecological holism suggests a sense of unity in which each individual being--both human and non-human--deserves equal status. Humans are not superior to other species and thus have a duty to the natural and social environment. My analysis of To a God Unknown suggests Steinbeck's notion of ecological holism which means not only the inseparable union between humans and nature but also unity among different groups of people in terms of religion and gender. My reading of The Grapes of Wrath points out that the absence of ecological awareness causes both environmental and social exploitation. It also suggests that since the problems of environmental and social domination are closely related, it is necessary to solve them together. Furthermore, I argue that in East of Eden familial relationships affect individuals' interpersonal relations and their ecological responsibility. While family conflicts disrupt the ability to establish a relationship with nature and other people, family kinship helps create interpersonal relations and environmental concern.

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Over the past fifty years, critics have studied John Steinbeck's literary works from various standpoints. We may categorize critical studies on Steinbeck--which appear in the form of books, collections of essays, articles and dissertations--into five major trends. First, a number of critics take a Marxist approach to Steinbeck's works, considering him to be a proletarian writer. Second, critics use a historical approach and interpret his novels in the context of American and global history. Moreover, some critics are interested in examining Steinbeck's use of myth whereas others give increasing attention to feminism and minorities' studies in his novels. Lastly, his ecological vision as presented in his fiction and non-fiction has become more influential on scholarship on Steinbeck. It is also noteworthy that critics tend to blend these different approaches in their analysis of Steinbeck's literary works.

As for the first approach, since Steinbeck focuses on the struggle between different social classes, this fact invites his critics to view his works as having Marxist leanings. Steinbeck's Marxist ideology is central to controversy among scholars. While some critics approve of his Marxist ideology, others criticize it. Steinbeck and His Critics (1957), a collection of critical essays edited by Ernest Tedlock and Cecil Wicker, serves as a good example that illustrates the two divergent views on Steinbeck's Marxist ideology. For instance, Edwin Burgum's "The Sensibility of John Steinbeck" praises Steinbeck's awareness of social problems. Focusing on his belief in communist practices, Burgum points out that Steinbeck suggests possibilities for solving social problems in some of his novels. In contrast, many critics insist that

Steinbeck's Marxist ideology is merely theoretical and thus unworkable. Freeman Champney's "John Steinbeck, Californian," for example, argues that Steinbeck's concept of communism is not applicable to the American nation as a whole because it derives from his limited background as a Californian. In a similar vein, Frederic Carpenter's "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer" asserts that since Steinbeck's knowledge of political philosophy is very superficial, he does not succeed in constructing an effective communist system in his novels.

Secondly, many scholars place Steinbeck's novels in the context of American and global history. Since most of his literary works were written during the two world wars, critics tend to draw parallels between the texts and their historical context. For example, Warren French's John Steinbeck (1961) notes that Steinbeck portrays California as representative of the chaotic world during the war period. Like French's work, Susan Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle's collection of critical essays, entitled Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck (2002), stands as another example in analyzing Steinbeck's novels from a historical standpoint. Christina Gold's "Changing Perceptions of Homelessness," for instance, places Steinbeck's novels in the context of the Great Depression in America, pointing out that his literary works reflect the attempt to evoke sympathy for migrants in California. In addition, some critics also explore Steinbeck's novels in relation to French history. Christine Rucklin's "Beyond France, Steinbeck's The Short Reign of Pippin IV," for example, analyzes the presentation of French history in Steinbeck's fiction, arguing that Steinbeck conceives of French history as a cyclical process.

Thirdly, critics are interested in examining Steinbeck's use of myth in his novels. Most critical works on this area focus on how myth is incorporated into Steinbeck's fiction. For instance, Joseph Fontenrose's John Steinbeck: An

Introduction and Interpretation (1963) illustrates how Steinbeck integrates into his novels various myths, such as the Grail legend, the Faust theme, the Trojan epic, and several folkloric elements. Similarly, Robert Murray Davis's Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays (1972) analyzes how Steinbeck deploys medieval romance, especially the Arthurian legend, in his novels as a way of discussing the themes of quest, chivalric loyalty and the destructive consequences of an adulterous relationship. In addition to the investigation of Steinbeck's use of myth, some scholars particularly examine Christian myths in his novels. One example is Ricardo Carrillo's thesis, entitled Elements of the Biblical Story of Cain and Abel in the Novels of John Steinbeck (1996). Carrillo discusses how Steinbeck employs the Christian story of Cain and Abel to explore the themes of duality, sibling murder and the curse of Cain.

Fourthly, feminism and minorities' studies constitute one important area in scholarship on Steinbeck. As for feminist readings of Steinbeck, some critics assert that Steinbeck is a misogynist whereas the opposing side highly regards him as a feminist writer. Fontenrose's John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (1963) exemplifies the criticism that argues Steinbeck's negative attitude toward women. Fontenrose points out that Steinbeck reveals his strong dislike of women in his characterization of two kinds of females: the whore who serves as males' sexual object and the sexless, unattractive mother. On the other side, such critical works as Liesl Hope Ward's thesis, entitled Midwives of Grace: Feminist Spirituality (1994), and Lorelei Cederstrom's article "Beyond the Boundaries of Sexism: The Archetypal Feminine versus Anima Women in Steinbeck's Novels" (2002) concentrate on Steinbeck's glorification of women in his novels. Examining feminist theology in Steinbeck's novels, Ward, for example, particularly points out that Steinbeck is prone to create the mother figure in many of his literary works to be God-like. Like Ward,

Cederstrom examines how Steinbeck imbues his women characters with the feminine values of wholeness and interdependent relatedness, values that sustain the community. Apart from the feminist standpoint, the area of minorities' studies is also significant to criticism on Steinbeck. Many scholars analyze characters from different ethnic backgrounds who are recurrent in his novels. For instance, Marcia Yarmus's dissertation, entitled The Hispanic World of John Steinbeck (1984), points out that Steinbeck has a good attitude toward the Hispanic people. Yarmus notes that the writer's portrayal of Spaniards, Mexican Indians and half-Mexicans as sincere and genuine is influenced by his Hispanic background. Next, Bo Li's thesis, entitled The Chinese as Portrayed in the Writings of Several Prominent American Authors (1989), asserts that Steinbeck's Chinese characters tend to be stereotyped and distorted. Finally, Louis Owens's Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel (1992) considers Steinbeck's treatment of Native Americans in his novels. As Owen notes, Steinbeck is inclined to infuse his Native American characters with mystical power and present them as the symbol of unconscious impulses.

Finally, since the emergence of ecocriticism in 1990, critics have paid more attention to Steinbeck's environmental vision. Those scholars tend to evaluate the influence of biology on Steinbeck's literary works. While some critics reject Steinbeck's notion of ecology, others praise it. The two 1997 articles, Peter Englert's "Education of Environmental Scientists: Should We Listen to Steinbeck and Ricketts's Comments?" and Warren French's "How Green Was John Steinbeck?" illustrate the weaknesses of Steinbeck's scientific knowledge in his novels and prose writings. Englert criticizes Steinbeck's works for lacking a broad view of the sciences of ecology. French also charges that Steinbeck's environmental insight is merely inspirational and not substantiated by ecological evidence. In contrast, Steinbeck and

the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches (1997), a collection of essays edited by Susan Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw and Wesley Tiffney regards Steinbeck as the forerunner of literary environmentalism in America. The editors note the combination between the literary elements and scientific observation in Steinbeck's novels appeals to readers from various groups. For example, Marilyn McEntyre's "Natural Wisdom: Steinbeck's Men of Nature as Prophets and Peacemakers" examines Steinbeck's vision of ecology in his novels. McEntyre points out that Steinbeck's characters perceive nature from both a scientific and mystical viewpoint. Moreover, Brian Railsback's Parallel Expeditions: Charles Darwin and the Art of John Steinbeck (1995) examines the Darwinian theory in Steinbeck's novels. Railsback explains that Steinbeck's portrayal of his characters is influenced by the Darwinian notion of the evolution of natural beings.

My thesis analyzes Steinbeck's novels from an ecological standpoint, hoping to bring to the fore the significance of human relationships to the non-human world in literary studies. As Cheryll Glotfelty argues in The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996), the institution of literary studies should respond to global environmental crises. Glotfelty explains that critics tend to ignore the existence of the non-human world in their critical works because, usually they consider the depiction of the environment as simply setting. This reasoning tends to consign to oblivion the study of the natural world in literature. This thesis is based on my belief that an ecocritical approach can help redress the imbalance caused by anthropocentric literary criticism and draw our attention to the significance of ecological problems. My thesis aims to re-examine John Steinbeck's classic novels in order to investigate his environmental vision and his suggestions to counter ecological exploitation.

Focusing on three novels that portray the relationship between humans and nature: To a God Unknown (1933), The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and East of Eden (1952), I argue that his ecological insight is characterized by a quality of wholeness. Steinbeck's ecological holism suggests a sense of unity in which each individual being--both human and non-human--deserves equal status. Humans are not superior to other species and thus have a duty to the natural world. Additionally, Steinbeck depicts the relationships among people in society as based on the same principle as that guiding the relationship between humans and the natural world. While it is generally accepted that for humans, the natural world is their environment, my reading of Steinbeck's novels suggests that the society of humans constitutes an equally important environment for humans as well.

Analyzing the development of the protagonist's ecological awareness in To a God Unknown, the second chapter argues that the novel demonstrates the writer's vision of the ideal connection between human beings and the environment. The protagonist's wrong view of nature is gradually changed by his close contact with the natural world. This prompts him to fully realize his inseparable union with the land and his responsibility to protect it from destruction. Moreover, the protagonist's physical and spiritual oneness with nature enhances his comprehension of the unity of the social environment in terms of religion and gender. While Steinbeck presents in To a God Unknown the protagonist's intimate kinship with nature and his understanding of the harmony among people, he illustrates in The Grapes of Wrath human dissociation from nature and other groups of people. The third chapter points out that ecological and social exploitation both in Oklahoma and in California arises from a lack of ecological awareness. It discusses how environmental exploitation is interwoven with social domination and, thus, argues that the two problems should be

solved together. Furthermore, the fourth chapter argues that in East of Eden familial relationship affects individuals' interpersonal relations and their ecological responsibility. While family conflicts disrupt the ability to establish relationships with nature and other people, family kinship helps create interpersonal relations and environmental concern.

My thesis will contribute to a better understanding of ecological awareness in John Steinbeck's novels. In studying his environmental vision, I wish to draw my readers' attention to an important fact: humans' attitude toward nature significantly shapes their treatment of other humans and the environment. I believe that, if people adjust and/or change their attitude toward nature, social and environmental problems may be reduced. Moreover, as my thesis focuses on Steinbeck's view of both humans and the natural world as an integral part of the ecological system, I hope to invite my readers to seriously consider their treatment of both the human and non-human environment.



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CHAPTER II

Ecological Holism in To a God Unknown

Each figure is a population and the stones, the trees and the muscled mountains are the world--but not the world apart from man--the world and man--the one inseparable unit man plus his environment. Why they should ever have been understood as being separate I do not know. (qtd. in Shillinglaw 8)

In this statement, which is part of his journal-like notes that he occasionally sent to his friend while he was composing To a God Unknown, Steinbeck discusses his ideal environmental vision which is founded upon the concept of an inseparable oneness between humans and the natural world. In the novel, I examine the relationship between humans and the natural world as well as among individuals in society through the learning process of the protagonist whose life is intimately interwoven with nature. Not only does this character leave his home in Vermont to set up a farm and establish his family in central California but he also confronts a severe drought in the valley and learns how to save the land from destruction. To explore the depth of Steinbeck's environmental awareness, I will analyze in this chapter the development of the protagonist's ecological consciousness and the process of his gradual union with the natural world.

Critics have studied this novel from different critical approaches. For example, Warren French's John Steinbeck (1961) exemplifies those critical works that analyze Steinbeck's use of myth in this novel. French points out that this novel is similar to T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land in its use of mythical allusions, such as the Fisher King and the Grail legend. Using a similar approach, Peter Lisca's John

Steinbeck: Nature and Myth (1978) argues that the writer relies upon the Hindu myths in his construction of the protagonist. Lisca further explains that Steinbeck derives the main character from the Indian hero who discovers and worships the sacred rock that he regards as identical with Lord Shiva's form lingam. In addition, Lester Marks's Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck (1971) employs a thematic approach, noting that this novel primarily deals with the way the characters apply different rituals as a means of searching for their true identity. Furthermore, James Kelley's "The Great Tide Pool," (1997) taking a philosophical approach, proposes that Steinbeck's characters are practitioners of visceral understanding. Encompassing intuitive knowledge, the characters are able to explore the pantheistic view of the natural world. Next, Lorelei Cederstrom's "Beyond the Boundaries of Sexism" (2002) offers a feminist reading of the novel. Cederstrom praises both the women characters and the femininity of nature as possessing the value of restoration that brings about gender balance.

Apart from these approaches, quite a few critics have recently paid attention to Steinbeck's environmental vision. Interestingly, they have divergent opinions on his environmental ethics. For instance, John Timmerman's "Steinbeck's Environmental Ethic: Humanity in Harmony with the Land" (1997) skeptically questions his portrayal of the relationship between humans and nature, arguing that Steinbeck's environmental ethics lack universal values. Timmerman explains that the protagonist concentrates only on his self-interest and the land that he takes care of, thus failing to address broader issues of humans' daily responsibilities to protect the land. To Timmerman, environmental ethics should be practical enough for the general public and extended to the natural world as a whole. On the other hand, Kathleen Hicks's

dissertation, entitled Consilience and Ecological Vision in the Works of John Steinbeck (2003), acclaims Steinbeck's environmental ethics, arguing that he is successful in suggesting to the general public a moral code that he believes should be expanded to the natural world. Hicks points out that conscience plays a central role in driving Steinbeck's major characters to protect not only the land but also the whole cosmos. She therefore regards Steinbeck as one of the earliest writers to promote a morality that can be extended to the natural world. Additionally, Hicks claims that Steinbeck distinctly blends his environmental ethics with his comprehension of the science of ecology.

Taking the ecocritical approach, I further examine this issue of Steinbeck's environmental vision. To fully characterize the writer's ecological insight and reveal its comprehensiveness, I mainly argue that Steinbeck constructs what I call "ecological holism" to establish the harmonious co-existence between humans and the natural world as well as among individuals in society. By this term "ecological holism," I mean that the development of the protagonist's oneness with nature corresponds with his gradual understanding of the oneness between humans and their social environment. Steinbeck suggests the sense of union between humans and nature, in which both of them form integral parts of the indivisible whole. Moreover, he extends this concept of oneness to demonstrate the unity of humans and their social environment, especially in terms of religion and gender. Steinbeck first points out the protagonist's sense of superiority to the natural world. It is his close contact with nature that gradually changes this improper attitude and allows him to discover the union between himself and nature. The protagonist's ecological awakening is first made possible by his gradual acquisition of an insight into the fluidity and unpredictability of the land. Then, this experience of the mutability of nature helps

him understand nature by intuition. Furthermore, his settlement in the country significantly reinforces his ability to discern and establish himself as part of the natural world.

At the beginning of the novel, Steinbeck portrays the protagonist, Joseph Wayne, as holding the wrong view that humans can possess and take control of the natural world. Joseph expresses his desire to own the land when he asks for his father's permission to leave home to settle his family in the West: "I have a hunger for land of my own, sir. I have been reading about the West and the good cheap land there. . . . You have only to live a year on the land and build a house and plough a bit and the land is yours. No one can ever take it away" (176). The main character's statements--"land of my own" and "land is yours"--suggest his perception of the land as property. His plan to search for the new land also illustrates the westward movement in the Twenties. At that time, people explored the American West because the government allowed those who lived on the land to become its legitimate owners. This Homestead Act reflects the human view of the natural world as a place which they can invade and occupy (Barry 30). The human tendency to view the land as merely property can lead them to destroy the wilderness and transform it into their farmland.

Although his determination to search for the land partly arises from his love for it, it is noteworthy that Joseph's love is mixed with his sense of superiority to the natural world and his desire to gain mastery over it. In his first entrance into central California after his father's permission, Joseph views himself as the husband and the father of the land: "[f]or a moment the land had been his wife" (183) and "he felt that the trees were his children and the land his child" (181). This view can suggest his love for nature and his full realization of his duty to protect it. However, it

simultaneously discloses his belief in humans' superiority to nature and thus their ability to possess and govern the land. Furthermore, the protagonist's perception of the land as his own family alone can be criticized as rather limited as it focuses only on his personal benefit. Moreover, Steinbeck portrays the protagonist's view of himself as the rightful owner of the land: "[t]he hunger in his eyes became rapaciousness as he looked down the long green valley. His possessiveness became a passion. 'It's mine,' he chanted" (182). His declaration--"[i]t's mine"--illustrates his arrogance and his confidence in the human power to take control the land. Robin Attfield points out that such an attitude can lead humans to exploit the natural environment (21).

More significantly, Steinbeck also portrays how the protagonist's idea of mastery over nature results in his misunderstanding of the condition of the natural world. At first when he arrives in central California, Joseph sees the land's condition as fixed and unchanging. Although his native friend informs him that drought will occur every ten years and force people to search for a better place to live, Joseph confirms his belief in the unchangeable fertility of the land by stating: "I don't like to think about it. It won't come again, surely. Feel how tall the grass is already" (188). Joseph cannot imagine that such a fertile land as "The Valley of Our Lady" can become dry. Since there is no sign of drought around the area, he presumably thinks nothing about this place can be changed. His perception of the land here suggests a tendency to see the natural world to be permanently beneficial to human beings. Since humans tend to value the land for the benefits they can gain from it, they are inclined to think that it exists only to serve them, and therefore they become blind to the land's unpredictable changes. Corresponding with this claim is Joseph Desjardins' statement that humans always see the natural world as beautiful and

productive as that of their imagination whereas nature is actually elusive and can be destructive (174). This perception of the natural world can bring about environmental problems in which the passivity of nature wrongly assures humans of their power to occupy and utilize the land.

Joseph's improper attitudes toward the natural world--the desire for mastery over nature and the perception of nature as fixed and unchanging--induce him to misinterpret his father's blessing. Joseph first sees the blessing that he receives from his father before he leaves home as the sanction that enhances his rightful mastery over the farm and reinforces the fertility of his land. When Joseph establishes his farm on the new land, he firmly believes that his father's blessing can help multiply the number of the cattle on the ranch, as the narrator comments: "[p]erhaps because he had received the blessing, Joseph was the unquestioned lord of the clan. . . . He spoke with the sanction of the grass, the soil, the beasts wild and domesticated; he was the father of the farm" (199). He misinterprets the blessing that his father passes him as the bestowal of the authority to govern the land. He is therefore misled in viewing himself as the ruler of the natural world and considering the land as his own territory. Additionally, his perception of himself as the father of the farm demonstrates the idea of patriarchy. That is, Joseph regards himself as the figure of authority responsible for the productivity of the land and the well-being of the whole community. However, the tendency to praise patriarchy can lead to the practice of marginalization on and exploitation of nature that is viewed as having female qualities.

Closely related to Joseph's misunderstanding of his father's blessing is his interpretation of the Bible that misleads him in a sense of superiority over the natural world. In Joseph's attempt to multiply the number of the cattle on his ranch, he compares himself to Abraham: "as he notched the ears of the first young calves, he

felt the joy that Abraham must have felt when the huge promise bore fruit. when his tribes men and his goats began to increase” (199). Steinbeck alludes to Abraham who is believed to have received God’s blessing to create the fertility of the land and proclaim the Gospel: “The Lord said to Abram, ‘As for you, leave your land, your relatives and your father’s household for a land which I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous and you shall be a blessing’ ” (Genesis 12:1). Joseph believes that his father, whom he regards as God in his life, blesses him and gives him the land before he leaves home: “[o]ur father gave me a blessing before I came out here, an old blessing, the kind it tells about in the Bible, I think” (205). The comparison between his father’s sanction and God’s blessing for Abraham in the Bible gives him the wrong impression of his role as Abraham whom he considers as the leader of the farm. As Lynn White, Jr. cogently argues in “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), the human tendency to interpret the Bible to support their role as the owner of the land is the root cause of their improper treatment of the land. Since they view nature as a resource that God exclusively created to serve them, humans tend to think that it is acceptable to reap the most benefit from the natural world, thereby remaining unaware of the possible exploitation of nature that can seriously cause environmental problems (9-10).

Joseph’s contact with the land and his active engagement with it gradually influence his understanding of the land. One of the most crucial experiences that enables Joseph to adjust his view of the land is that of its mutability. In his first encounter with the forest in the new land, he discovers that this place embodies contradictory qualities that constantly disrupt his attempt to identify its nature. The scene that illustrates this experience is that of Joseph’s first arrival at the new land in

the central part of California, "Nuestra Senora." Joseph feels as if he were an inexperienced young man confronting an unexpected manifestation of the natural world: "[a]s he rode, Joseph became timid and yet eager, as a young man is who slips out to a rendezvous with a wise and beautiful woman. He was half-drugged and overwhelmed by the forest of Our Lady" (179). To Joseph, the land appears like a woman of mixed temperaments. The words "Our Lady" indicate the mother of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, who partakes of benevolence, mercy, and immaculate purity. On the other hand, she is a "femme fatale" who has power to destroy and dominate his mind. Not only does this woman deprive Joseph of his sense of self but she also completely spreads her power over him: "[t]his land might possess all of him if he were not careful" (179). He has to be aware of his security in the forest since the power of the land may intoxicate and overwhelm him.

During this first encounter, the mysterious and unpredictable power of the land appears to Joseph not only in the disturbing image of the Virgin Mary as a femme fatale but also in another confusing image of a Christian cathedral as a destructive place. Joseph's sense of the land's mysteriousness dawns upon him when he enters the forest: "[t]he endless green halls and aisles and alcoves seemed to have meanings as obscure and promising as the symbols of an ancient religion" (179). The land emerges to become a strange place for Joseph. To explain, the words "aisles" and "alcoves" suggest the image of a Christian cathedral. Moreover, the image of a long trail through the trees is reminiscent of the aisle of a church. Whereas one would expect a church to be peaceful, this church-like forest does not comfort Joseph's mind. He senses some mysterious power in this place which threatens him and stirs his fear of the land. The deceiving image of the forest also confuses him and makes him feel as if his walk were in a nightmare: "[a]s he rode on and on the fear came

upon him that this land might be the figure of a dream which would dissolve into a dry and dusty morning” (179). These deceptively fluid images of the land significantly disrupt his initial perception of the land as fixed and prompt him to realize that nature is beyond his comprehension. This experience of the forest can serve as a lesson that makes him aware of the unstable nature of the natural world and the uncertainty of his place in it.

In portraying the protagonist’s experience with the drought, Steinbeck further illustrates how Joseph comes to gradual realization that nature is an amoral force. The natural world that suffers from the drought appears as a human being who lies down emotionless:

[h]igh up on a tremendous peak, towering over the ranges and the valleys, the brain of the world was set, and the eyes that look down on the earth’s body. The brain could not understand the life on its body. It lay inert, knowing vaguely that it could shake off the life, the towns, the little houses of the fields with earthquake fury. (317)

Steinbeck personifies the entire landscape: the top of the hill is compared to the brain while the ranges and the valleys are equated to the body. That the brain unintentionally inflicts a disaster upon its own body as well as human beings and other living creatures can suggest not only nature’s amorality but also its incomprehensibility. These qualities rather confuse Joseph, for it seems to him that nature does not understand itself. It is therefore, to Joseph, impossible for human beings to fully understand the natural world. This experience also leads him to realize the insignificance of humans in the natural world. “Good fields were there, and the houses and the people were so small they could be seen only a little,” (317) he says. Joseph now discerns humans as merely tiny parts of nature’s immensity.

Joseph's new perception of nature as an unpredictable and incomprehensible force prompts him to feel a deep sense of humility toward the natural world. The fact that Joseph is unable to take control of and restore the land dismantles his old view of nature as a conquerable woman. His statement about the land--"[i]t isn't ours. . . . It's like a beautiful woman, and she isn't ours" (338)--reveals his new understanding that nature is actually not a submissive woman that he can possess and overcome. As Lorelei Cederstrom notes, nature as a mysterious woman requires Joseph's entire life to understand her real self (78). Furthermore, Joseph's expression to the old man he meets in the forest--"[m]y knowledge has failed" (337)--clearly demonstrates his unconditional acceptance of his inability to deal with nature. It also implies that his past view of himself as the father and the ruler of the farm is collapsing. Joseph now realizes both the greatness of the natural world and humans' limited power.

In addition to this new discernment, Joseph's encounter with the drought also enables him to see another aspect of the natural world: nature as a destructive and threatening force. When the land becomes extremely dry, Steinbeck portrays it as a starving and dying animal that can madly destroy everything. For example, Joseph "thought of the hills, like blind snakes with frayed and peeling skins, lying in wait about this stronghold where the water still flowed" and "remembered how the land sucked down his little stream before it had run a hundred yards" (345). The land is here portrayed as a dying snake that Joseph can do nothing to help. This description illustrates the land in its critical condition and its desperate struggle to survive. The phrase "sucked down" implies that the land can become crazily harmful when it desperately needs water to maintain its life. Another example is an image of the land as a ravenous dog: "'[t]he land is savage,' he thought, 'like a dog far gone in hunger.' . . . 'The land would come in and blot this stream and drink my blood if it

could. It is crazy with thirst' ” (345). This brutality of the land reinforces Joseph's insight into the mysterious unpredictability of nature, making him fully aware that he is totally at the mercy of the natural world.

Joseph's insight into the fluidity of nature, as well as his attitude of respect and humility toward the natural world, is a prerequisite for his intuitive perception of nature. The intuition that lies latent in Joseph's mind can surface and manifest itself only when he has a close contact with the natural world and perceives it with an appropriate attitude. Joseph's first arrival in the Valley of Our Lady enables him to understand the sense of oneness between his father and the land. The narrator describes that Joseph first tries “[t]o combat the land a little, he thought of his father, of the calm and peace, the strength and eternal rightness of his father, and then in his thought the difference ended and he knew that there was no quarrel, for his father and this new land were one” (180). In this sudden realization, Joseph discovers that the power of nature is one with the strength of his father. This intuitive knowledge encourages him to realize that despite its destructiveness the land can also be peaceful and harmonious. Moreover, when he knows that his father is dead, Joseph believes that the spirit of the father comes to stay with him on the new land. “My father is in that tree. My father is that tree!” (193) Joseph regards an oak tree on the ranch as his father. This sense of union between the father and nature prompts him to pay more respect to the natural world. As James Kelley points out, Joseph's realization of oneness between his father and nature that arises from the intuition will further guide him to discover his own union with the natural world (33).

With his intuitive perception of nature, Joseph is able to discern its sacred role as a spiritual refuge. This intuitive knowledge stems from a communion between

Joseph's truly peaceful mind and the natural environment. His experience with the little stream in the pine grove on the hill gives him the new perception that the natural world is holy and healing. In his first entrance into the pine grove, he notices: "[a] short, heavy green moss covered the rock with soft pile" and views that "[t]he edifice was something like an altar that had melted and run down over itself" (207). That Joseph likens the rock on the stream to the altar where one worships gods of nature and compares the green moss to the melted candle suggests the sacredness of the natural world. This vision reminds Joseph of his memory of the ancient place in his old dream. "This is holy--and this is old. This is ancient--and holy," (207) he says. Joseph also realizes that nature has a power to heal and give comfort to his mind as he says, "[i]t would be a place to run to, away from pain or sorrow or disappointment or fear" (218).

More significantly, thanks to his intuition and humility toward nature, Joseph gains profound knowledge of his union with the land. When he has closer contact with the rock on the stream, Joseph finds that he and the land have something in common. In the scene in which he comes to meet his native neighbour who accidentally kills his brother in the pine grove at night, Joseph discovers that the position of the rock is the origin of the stream that will later become a great river and thus the major source of life. The narrator illustrates this scene:

Joseph walked to the rock and drew his hand over the heavy fur of moss. "Out of the center of the world," he thought, and he remembered the poles of a battery. "Out of the heart of the world." He walked away slowly, hating to turn his back on the rock. (253)

Again, Joseph suddenly and intuitively feels his union with this place: "Joseph felt very glad now, for within him there was arising the knowledge that his nature and the

nature of the land were the same" (253). This mysterious knowledge is later clarified when he shares it with his wife: "[a]nd this is harder to say: While I sat there I went into the rock. The little stream was flowing out of me and I was the rock" (307). Here, Steinbeck elevates his protagonist to a mythic figure who has established an ideal relationship with the natural world to the point where he miraculously sees himself as identical to the rock, which is the source of life. Interestingly, Joseph's realization of his oneness with the rock also enables him to relinquish his ego and experience a new kind of love--unlimited and all-encompassing. Joseph expresses his endless love for nature: "I loved the rock. It's hard to describe. I loved the rock more than you or the baby or myself. . . . and the rock was--I don't know--the rock was the strongest dearest thing in the world" (307). It is important to emphasize that this transformation of his limited love for his family into his selfless love for the natural world as a whole is made possible by his intuitive perception of and his new relationship with nature.

Joseph's intimate relationship with the natural world, in turn, gives him a balance and completeness of spirit. It enables him to gradually understand the true meaning of his father's blessing. Joseph can now see that it does not mean the right to rule the farm. In contrast, it is the tranquility of emotional and spiritual balance that he derives from his insight into the oneness of all things in the universe. Joseph expresses this wisdom to the tree that he regards as his father: "[e]ven a pure true feeling of the difference between pleasure and pain is denied me. All things are one, and all a part of me" (242). This statement suggests that his binary perception of reality is dissolving and he has gained the consciousness of ecological holism. When he loses his brother, Joseph can come to terms with this loss: "Benjy is dead, and I am neither glad nor sorry. There is no reason for it to me. It is just so. I know now, my

father, what you were--lonely beyond feeling loneliness, calm because you had no contact" (242). Once he no longer differentiates one thing from another, such as pleasure and pain, or life and death, he is able to experience life in its various dimensions with peace and equanimity.

This spiritual balance that Joseph receives from his close relationship with nature enables him to understand the interrelatedness of all the livings in the natural world. This knowledge makes him realize that all members of the natural world are connected. In the scene when Elizabeth falls from the slippery rock in the stream and dies, Joseph is able to maintain his equanimity: "[h]e wanted to make himself know what happened, for he could feel the beginning of the calm settling upon him. He wanted to cry out once in personal pain before he was cut off and unable to feel sorrow or resentment" (313). Here his feeling of personal pain is superceded by his equanimity that is based on the reality that Joseph also realizes that Elizabeth will be transformed into the rock: "[t]he forces gather and center and become one and strong. Even I will join the center" (314). His realization that his wife will always remain with him on the rock in the stream suggests that death is a means of returning life and that nothing is ever lost in the life cycle.

In addition to the gradual changes in his perception of nature, Joseph's settlement in the new land is another factor that enables him to develop his intimate relationship with nature. His inhabitation in such a place as the Valley of Our Lady induces Joseph to learn about traditional culture and folk beliefs that enhance his understanding of human kinship with nature. His interaction with people in this community also makes him discover that folk wisdom deeply concerns the harmonious existence of humans with the natural world. Moreover, Joseph's life in the Valley of

Our Lady gives him a chance to truly comprehend the web of relations in nature. He realizes that all lives in the natural world have to depend on one another. In short, his settlement in the new land necessitates his adapting himself to become part of the community, thereby making him and his family part of the natural world.

Joseph's learning about the beliefs and culture held by people in his community reinforces his intuitive knowledge of nature's sacredness. Juanito, a native inhabitant of the valley, acquaints him with the concept of mother earth. Juanito tells him: "[m]y mother said how the earth is our mother, and how everything that lives has life from the mother and goes back into the mother" (194). This concept of mother earth deepens Joseph's realization of the importance of nature. Moreover, Joseph learns about the belief in the power, and sacredness, of nature from Juanito. As Lester Marks notes, the contemplation of Juanito's Indian mother on the mystery of the new life in her womb at the rock suggests not only her intimacy with, and respect for, nature but also the native inhabitants' belief that their ancestors' spirits dwell in nature before they are reborn (38). It can then be interpreted that Juanito's mother wants to be close to nature in order to pay respect to the ancestors who will come back to life again. It is also on the rock in the stream that she releases her worry concerning the child's life in her womb.

Moreover, Joseph learns that people in the community perform the ritual dance at the fiesta to assure the productivity of the natural world. This ritual deepens his insight into the union between humans and the natural world. The narrator describes the atmosphere of this performance:

[t]he dancers lost identity. Faces grew rapt, shoulders fell slightly forward, each person became a part of the dancing body, and the soul of the body

was the rhythm. . . . We have found something here, all of us. In some way we've come closer to the earth for a moment. (269)

This ritual allows people to see themselves as part of the natural environment and realize their dependence on the natural world. This ritual also provides them with a way to worship the gods of nature that take care of their farm and increase the crops in their field. Joseph also finds out that the power of this ritual can bring rain to the valley: “[w]hen he looked at the western hills and saw a black cloud-head, high and ominous, coming over from the sea, he knew what was to come. ‘Of course,’ he said, ‘it will bring the rain. Something must happen when such a charge of prayer is let loose’ ” (269). Joseph fully appreciates the fertility ritual that can create productivity to the land and the people.

Furthermore, Joseph understands a sense of interrelatedness among all lives in the natural world from the old man’s sacrificial rite. While his farmland is totally destroyed by the drought, Joseph discovers that the old man’s place near the Valley of Our Lady remains productive. The fertility of the land here is mysteriously maintained by the old man’s ritual. As he explains, “[e]very night I kill some little thing, a bird, a rabbit or a squirrel. . . . If I have done it right, you [a pig] will be dead when the sun is dead” (332). The old man believes that the sacrifice of an animal’s life helps prolong the life of the sun, which is the main source of all lives. He therefore, symbolically, uses an animal’s death to substitute that of the sun at dusk. To put it differently, through the fertility ritual, he sacrifices a small animal to maintain the life of nature as a whole. Furthermore, although it seems superstitious and rather irrational, the old man also believes that ritual enables him to identify himself with the sun. As the old man further points out,

“[t]he sun is life, I give life to life”—“I make a symbol of the sun’s death.”
 When I made these reasons I knew they weren’t true. . . . I can’t tell that it
 does not help the sun. But it is for me. In the moment, I am the sun. Do
 you see? I, through the beast, am the sun. I burn in the death. (333)

The old man’s inexplicable feeling of oneness with the sun suggests that he sees himself as part of the natural world. To Joseph, this experience serves as a lesson about the interrelatedness of all lives--human and non-human--in nature.

Apart from the knowledge gained from his interaction with other people in this community, Joseph is able to learn about the idea of the food chain in which all lives in nature are connected. In the middle of the novel, in the forest he sees pigs that eat an eel, and one of them is, in turn, eaten by a lion. Joseph initially thinks that this chain is rather unfair to the victims, and he wants to kill the lion to help the pig. However, Joseph discovers that this relation is part of the natural cycle in which stronger species kill weaker ones in order to survive. This experience thus allows him to clearly fathom interdependence among all beings in the natural world: “[h]e thought how a new bond tied him to the earth, and how this land of his was closer now” (316). Now that he concretely understands the complexity of the ecological system in which the web of relations is intricately sustained and the life cycle is perfectly completed, his love and admiration for the natural world significantly increases. Moreover, as Robin Attfield points out, this knowledge of ecology helps create the idea of the intrinsic value of nature that arises from its duty of maintaining harmony in the ecosystem (11).

Additionally, Joseph’s endeavour to settle his and his family’s lives supplies him with an essential and first-hand experience as a member of the natural world. Once he settles his family on the new land, he learns that he, as well as his family, has

to depend on the fertility of nature. That he truly feels his family's kinship with nature is evidenced by the fact that he deems his child to be the product of his family's connection with the natural world. "Yes—the child is precious, but not so precious as the bearing of it. That is as real as a mountain. That is a tie to the earth. . . . It is a proof that we belong here, dear, my dear. The only proof that we are not strangers," (274) he says. Instead of focusing on the preciousness of the child itself, Joseph considers the child more like a bond that ties his family to the land and ascertains the family's sense of belonging to this community. This view reflects the development of his perception of nature; now he sees nature as inseparable from his life. Moreover, the birth in his own family offers Joseph as the father the opportunity to become part of the life cycle, the idea of which he has so far only witnessed in other natural beings. His statement to his wife, "[y]ou are the cycle" (290), indicates his understanding of his wife's active involvement in the life cycle as she gives a new life to the natural world.

Joseph's rural life that is intimately related to nature creates his genuine love and concern for the natural world. When the land suffers from drought, Joseph's physical condition is strongly affected by the dry condition of the land. " 'My skin is dry,' he called. 'I want to get wet.' He saw the first big drops fall, thudding up dust in little spurts, then the ground was peppered with black drops" (260). Moreover, Joseph's concern for the land causes him mental sickness. "Elizabeth saw how the worry was making Joseph thin, how his eyes were strained and almost white. . . . He looked about his land and it seemed to be dying. The pale hills and fields, the dust-grey sage, the naked stones frightened him" (305). That Joseph shares the land's suffering indicates that his body and soul has become one with the land.

Joseph's serious concern for the land prompts him to seek various ways--both pagan and Christian--to restore fertility to the land. Joseph's pagan beliefs play a significant role in his effort to protect the land. For example, he offers meat to an oak tree that he regards as the dwelling place of his father's spirit: "[t]here," he said, and reaching high up, laid the meat in the crotch of the tree. "Protect us if you can," he begged. "The thing that's coming may destroy us all" (275). Joseph hopes that this offering will please his father's spirit in nature that can help him save the land. Moreover, he gives his child to his sister-in-law, Rama, believing his sacrifice will restore productivity to nature: "[i]t might help [the land], to give the child to you. It seems to me a thing that might help the land" (341). This sacrificial act suggests Joseph's selflessness; he sees the natural world as more important than his own family. In addition, Joseph imitates the old man's sacrificial rite. However, his sacrificing of the calf cannot help the land: "[p]oor, starved creature, it had so little blood. . . . It's won't work for me" (365). When no pagan ritual can help him protect the land, Joseph even turns to the Christian church to ask for the priest's help. He pleads with Father Angelo to pray for the rain: "I've come to ask you to pray for the rain. . . . the land is dying," Joseph cried suddenly. "Pray for rain, Father! Have you prayed for rain?" (358) However, this attempt does not work for him since the priest refuses to do so.

Nothing can help Joseph perform his role as protector of the land until he himself completely realizes his oneness with nature within his own body and soul. Joseph significantly develops his union with nature while he tries to protect from destruction the source of the stream that he regards as the centre of nature. As the narrator describes this scene:

he [Joseph] threw water on the scars where Elizabeth's feet had slipped. . . . As he worked, he knew the rock no longer as a thing separated from him. He had no more feeling of affection for it than he had for his own body. He protected it against death as he would have saved his own life. (345)

Here Joseph's whole being--his body and mind--is infused with an insightful feeling that he and the rock are of the same existence. To him, protecting the land "against death" is tantamount to saving his very own life. Joseph now thoroughly realizes his union with nature, the realization that will bring about his achievement of being protector of the natural world.

Once his whole existence--both physical and spiritual--becomes one with nature, Joseph is capable of sacrificing his own life to restore the natural world. In so doing, he slashes his wrist, for he believes that his blood will moisten the moss on the rock, which is the heart of the stream, and thus will save the land from drought. In this sacrificial scene, Joseph is able to establish his ideal relationship with the natural world:

he [Joseph] took out his knife again and carefully, gently opened the vessels of his wrist. The pain was sharp at first, but in a moment its sharpness dulled. He watched the bright blood cascading over the moss, and he heard the shouting of the wind around the grove. The sky was growing grey. And time passed and Joseph grew grey too. He lay on his side with his wrist outstretched and looked down the long black mountain range of his body. Then his body grew huge and light. It arose into the sky, and out of it came the streaking rain. "I should have known," he whispered. "I am the rain." And yet he looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss, He felt the driving rain, and heard it whipping down, pattering on the ground. He saw his hills grow dark with moisture. Then a lancing pain shot through the heart of the

world. "I am the land," he said, "and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while." (366)

In the process of his becoming one with nature, Joseph aspires to the transformation of his own identity while he is bleeding to death: his spirit mingles with the sky and his body unifies with the mountain. This image demonstrates the vast expansion of his whole being; that is, Joseph can no longer perceive himself as an individual but as the entire natural environment and he states that he is both "the rain" and "the land." His declaration about his new identity as the rain that comes to save the land from dryness points to his role as the land's protector. Paradoxically, while performing his duty to take care of the land, Joseph's sense of stewardship to it completely dissipates since at this moment he no longer sees the distinction between himself and the natural world. What Joseph is saving from destruction is therefore not only his natural world but also his own existence because he and nature have become part of each other in his perception. As he puts it, "he [Joseph] looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss" and "[h]e saw his hills grow dark with moisture." Here, he has achieved a complete union with nature. Additionally, the sacrifice of Joseph's life enables him to truly understand the harmony between life and death. He has come to fully realize, with his very experience, that the life cycle consists of life and death and without death, there cannot be the beginning of a new life. His statement--"[t]he grass will grow out of me in a little while"--suggests that all lives--both human and non-human--depend on and are interconnected with one another. This realization thus brings to his mind the unity of all lives as well as the oneness of life and death. This new perception of reality in which there no longer exists any distinction among all living beings in nature excellently illustrates

Steinbeck's comment about Joseph, "[t]he new eyes is being opened here in the west-- the new seeing" (qtd. in Benson 260).

It is important to note that Steinbeck's concept of "environmental holism" is a mixture of various concepts that define the relationship between humans and nature. In a way, Steinbeck's portrayal of nature as unpredictable, constantly changing and beyond human comprehension suggests the concept of naturalism that sees nature as an amoral and even destructive force. At the same time, Steinbeck's emphasis on Joseph's intuitive perception of nature, his view of nature as a spiritual refuge imbued with sacredness and a healing power together with his mystical relationship with nature clearly demonstrate the influence of the Romantic notion of nature. Steinbeck portrays nature as the teacher of the protagonist. Moreover, that Steinbeck has founded Joseph's oneness with the land upon his understanding of the ecosystem and life cycle indicates the role of ecology in Steinbeck's environmental concepts. Lastly, Joseph's intention of sacrificing his life to protect nature as a whole is similar to Aldo Leopold's idea of "The Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac* (1968) which privileges the survival of the ecosystem as a whole over the life of the individual. Leopold points out that since the balance of the natural environment is the most important thing that all lives have to maintain, it is thus appropriate for each individual to sacrifice his/her life to protect the ecosystem.

Furthermore, this chapter argues that Steinbeck extends his notion of "ecological holism" beyond the realm of natural surroundings. Since the environment, for Steinbeck, constitutes not only the natural world but also human beings, his "ecological holism" is also based upon the harmony between human beings and their social environment. While it portrays the protagonist's search for

oneness with nature. To a God Unknown is simultaneously concerned with social issues that are directly related to the harmonious co-existence of people from different social groups. In the rest of this chapter, I will examine how the novel suggests a non-discriminatory attitude in terms of religion and gender in order to fully illustrate Steinbeck's concept of ecological wholeness.

Joseph's memory of and his intimacy with the natural world enable him to discover the harmony between Christianity and paganism. In the scene of his wedding in the Monterey church, although he is very disappointing at the religious ritual devoid of any spiritual meaning, Joseph does point out the advent of God at its end:

[h]ere's God come late to the wedding. Here's the iron god at last. . . .
This is my own thing and I know it. Beloved bells, pounding your bodies with your frantic hearts! It is the sun sticks, striking the bell of the sky in the morning; and it's the hollow beating of rain on the earth's full belly.
(228)

It is interesting to notice that Joseph associates the ringing sound of the bells with the images that have emerged in his recollection of nature: the sun that strikes the bell of the sky and the sound of the beating rain on the earth. This association implicitly signifies that the God that he is here experiencing at church is identical with the God that he is familiar with in the natural world. This scene marks the first moment when Joseph recognizes that the two beliefs, fundamentally, share the same God.

Another example that suggests how Joseph's acquaintance with the natural world sustains his better understanding of the unity between Christianity and paganism is the scene when he and Elizabeth return to the Valley of Our Lady after their wedding in the Monterey church. In this scene, Joseph considers Jesus Christ as a symbol of suffering shared by all beings:

I have thought without words. . . . Christ nailed up might be more than a symbol of all pain. He might in very truth contain all pain. And a man standing on a hilltop with his arms outstretched, a symbol of the symbol, he too might be a reservoir of all the pain that ever was. (232)

Joseph relates Jesus Christ on the Cross to “a man standing on the hilltop with his arms outstretched” in terms of their suffering. It can be interpreted that the man on the hilltop, whose painful experience is similar to Christ’s, is a representative of the pagan who sacrifices himself to protect nature. The comparison between Christ and this man indicates that Joseph now realizes that Christian and pagan beliefs originate from the same source. That is, the two religions are similarly founded upon the principles of love and self-sacrifice. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck praises these fundamental ethical values which serve as the origin of all religious traditions.

Although Joseph realizes the unity between Christianity and paganism, he pays more attention to divinity in nature. As P. Balaswamy explains, Joseph perceives every object in the natural world as a manifestation of the Supreme Being (110). He thus can establish a direct and personal relationship with God in the natural world. His turning to the god of nature also results from his disappointment with a church that is inclined to perform meaningless ceremony. “There’s a foulness here. . . . Why must we go through this to find our marriage? Here in the church I’ve thought there lay a beauty if a man could find it, but this is only a doddering kind of devil worship” (227). Joseph’s criticism is targeted on institutionalized Christianity. To him, the ceremony held by the church is merely a ritualistic performance that is unable to provide any spiritual uplift. As a result, Joseph turns his interest to the simplicity of nature and regards the journey with Elizabeth back to the Valley of Our Lady as their true marriage:

[y]esterday we were married and it was no marriage. This is our marriage--through the pass--entering the passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy. This is a symbol of the undistorted real. I have a moment in my heart, different in shape, in texture, in duration from any other moment. (232)

Joseph greatly values this experience with the natural world, for it allows him and his wife to discover their place in nature and their role in the process of creation. This tendency to turn this attention to nature suggests the Romantic idea of nature that regards it as a spiritual refuge. As Richard Watson notes, one turns one's attention to the purity of nature because one wishes to escape from the boredom of society and search the meaning of life (2).

While Steinbeck presents the concept of religious oneness through Joseph's gradual affinity with nature, he also portrays other characters and other elements to illustrate this notion. For example, Joseph's wife, Elizabeth, sees her husband's activities and behaviour as imbued with both Christianity and paganism. For example, in the scene when Joseph goes out to celebrate the rain, the act of his putting his wet hands on her head reminds Elizabeth of the time when she received benediction. "Joseph, your hand is cold. When I was confirmed, the bishop laid his hand on my head as you are doing, and his hand was cold. It ran shivers down my back. I thought it was the Holy Spirit," (261) she says. The image of Joseph's raising his hand in benediction is reminiscent of that of the bishop. To Elizabeth, the bishop's benediction that helped her to get in touch with the Holy Spirit is similar to Joseph's doing that enables her to experience a communion with some spiritual power. Concurrently, his praising of rain demonstrates his worship of and gratitude to the god of nature who brings fertility to the land. Moreover, Elizabeth compares Joseph to Jesus Christ when they get married in the church: "when she drew a picture

of the Christ in her mind, He had the face, the youthful beard, the piercing puzzled eyes of Joseph, who stood beside her” (227). This explicitly shows that in Elizabeth’s mind Joseph’s physical appearance is similar to that of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the wife of Joseph’s brother, Rama, is another character who recognizes the combination of Christianity and paganism in Joseph. Rama discloses her attitude toward Joseph to Elizabeth:

[y]ou cannot think of Joseph dying. He is eternal. . . . I tell you this man is not a man, unless he is all men. The strength, the resistance, the long and stumbling thinking of all men, and all the joy and suffering, too, canceling each other out and yet remaining in the contents. He is all these, a repository for a little piece of each man’s soul, and more than that, a symbol of the earth’s soul. (247)

Rama here emphasizes both the Christian and pagan qualities that co-exist in the figure of Joseph. That she regards him as “eternal” reflects the quality of the Christian God whose existence is claimed to be everlasting and perpetual. Rama’s description of Joseph as “all men” suggests the characteristic of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself to redeem all humans’ sins and to maintain the lives of all humankind. Simultaneously, Rama praises Joseph as “a symbol of the earth’s soul.” This image reflects a belief in the sacred power of nature. Rama foresees that Joseph will be able to give up his life in order to save the natural world from devastation. Both Elizabeth’s and Rama’s perception of Joseph enhances the readers’ comprehension of the concept of religious oneness.

Steinbeck further points out that the notion of “ecological holism” helps improve people’s attitude toward all religions, urging a change from viewing religions as different, unrelated and unequal to regarding them as harmoniously co-existing. One illustration is the character of Joseph’s native friend, Juanito, who principally

relies upon the sacred power of nature and folk belief. In the scene when Juanito notices that Joseph is desperately trying to protect the land from drought in the pine grove, Juanito is able to discover the unity between paganism and Christianity:

while he looked at Joseph's face, Juanito thought of the old church in Nuestra Senora, with its thick adobe walls and mud floors. There was an open space at the eaves, and the birds flew in sometimes, during the mass. Often there were bird droppings on Saint Joseph's head, and on the blue mantle of Our Lady. The reason for his thought came slowly out of the picture. He saw the crucified Christ hanging on his cross, dead and stained with blood. There was no pain in his face, now he was dead, but only disappointment and perplexity, and over these, and infinite weariness. Jesus was dead and the Life was finished. Juanito built a tall blaze to see Joseph's face clearly, and the same things were there, the disappointment and the weariness. But Joseph was not dead. Even in his sleep his jaw was resistingly set. (355)

In Juanito's view, Joseph's face reminds him of the picture of the old church in Nuestra Senora which is portrayed as having both natural and Christian qualities. The church, which is made of the "adobe walls and mud floors," as well as its peaceful atmosphere in which "the birds flew in sometimes, during the mass" suggests the idea that the sacred sanctuary and the natural world are not separate but are part of each other. Juanito also sees the image of self-sacrificing Joseph in the pine grove as Saint Joseph in the church. This comparison demonstrates that the pagan and Christian saints are, in reality, identical. The portrayal of birds' "droppings on Saint Joseph's head, and on the blue mantle of Our Lady" implies that Christian saints are not part of supernatural power that is out of touch with people's lives in the natural world. Moreover, the fact that Joseph's face evokes the image of Jesus Christ that is "crucified" and "stained with blood" suggests that the quality of a saviour is not

limited to Jesus Christ alone but applicable to other humans as well. An ordinary man, such as Joseph, can therefore become a great savior by sacrificing himself to protect the natural world. Furthermore, Juanito also suggests that while Christ's sacrifice is over, Joseph still performs his sacrifice because he hopes that his life will restore the land. Steinbeck here emphasizes that a Christ-like nature can be plausibly applied to all human beings.

Not only does Joseph's native friend fully comprehend the unity of paganism and Christianity but Father Angelo also changes his perception of the two beliefs when he realizes the similarities between Joseph and Jesus Christ. The Christian priest initially sees Joseph's attempt to protect the land as a pagan ritual and devil worship. However, in the scene when Joseph asks him to pray to God to save the land, Father Angelo recognizes Joseph's potential as a redeemer:

[h]e was shaken by the force of the man. He looked up at one of his pictures, a descent from the cross, and he thought 'Thank God this man has no message. Thank God he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in'. And, in sudden heresy, 'else there might be a new Christ here in the West.' (359)

The depiction of Joseph again appears as the image of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This recognition makes Father Angelo decide to help Joseph after he comes back. "[H]e prayed that the rain might come quickly and save the dying land" (359). This act indicates that Father Angelo now accepts other kinds of belief and is also awakened to his duty to protect nature.

Apart from the portrayal of Joseph who embraces the qualities of the man of nature and of Jesus Christ, Steinbeck obliquely suggests through the novel's title and the epigraph the similarity between Hinduism and Christianity. It is interesting to notice that the phrase "To a God Unknown" and the epigraph are the adaptation of the

hymn to the god Prajapati from the ancient Hindu scripture Rig-Veda. The self-sacrifice made by Joseph Wayne to the Unknown God can be interpreted as being based upon the Indian belief that humans and the universe are inseparable. As P. Balaswamy points out, Indian scholars first recognized the non-dualistic concept of the novel from the title (109). In a similar vein, Peter Lisca explains that the epigraph is an adaptation of an Indian hymn, which was originally a request for the god Prajapati to help protect humankind (37). More interestingly, the adaptation of the Hindu hymn can be viewed as echoing Christian beliefs. “He is the giver of breath, and strength is his gift,” (1) “From His strength the mountains take being, and / the sea” (9-10) and “He made the sky and the earth, and His will fixed / their places” (14-15). While these lines refer to the god Prajapati, they also point to the Biblical story of creation, in which God is the Creator and the Ruler of all lives in the natural world. The insertion at the novel’s beginning of such a text whose meaning corresponds with the teachings of various religions suggests Steinbeck’s belief in the fundamental oneness of all religious traditions--Christianity, Hinduism, or paganism.

Additionally, Steinbeck alludes to the Biblical story in the Old Testament to balance it against his critique of Christians and institutionalized Christianity. In the novel, Steinbeck tends to depict Christians and institutionalized Christianity as unable to provide Joseph with spiritual support. For example, he portrays Joseph’s meaningless marriage in the church and Burton’s prejudice against Joseph’s worship of nature. However, it is worth noticing that Steinbeck, on the other hand, makes extensive use of the Biblical story of Joseph, Jacob’s son, in his construction of Joseph Wayne. For instance, Joseph Wayne receives a special blessing from his father, who tells him to put his hand under the old man’s thigh. His father says: “[c]ome to me, Joseph. Put your hand here--no, here. My father did it this way. A

custom so old cannot be wrong. Now, leave your hand there!” (177). This blessing can be seen as an allusion to an episode in the Bible during the last days of Jacob, “[w]hen the time of Israel’s death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt’ ” (Genesis 47:29). Not only is Joseph Wayne like Jacob’s son in receiving his father’s blessing, but the fathers of the two Josephs are also similar in terms of their wish to remain in their old countries and to be buried with their ancestors. Another example that illustrates Steinbeck’s use of the Bible in the novel is that Joseph Wayne and Jacob’s son in the Bible share the same destiny when confronting drought in a new country. In the novel, Joseph has to face the dry land after a few years of his settlement: “[t]he earth grew more grey and lifeless every week and the haystacks dwindled. . . .under the appetites of the hungry cows” (322). The encounter of Joseph with the futile land parallels the Biblical story of Jacob’s son who also confronted futility in Egypt: “[n]ow there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine” (Genesis 46:13). Steinbeck’s substantial use of the Bible in the novel helps justify his respect for Christianity, and its teachings as opposed to his critique of intolerant Christians and institutionalized Christianity devoid of moral and spiritual essence.

Since Steinbeck’s notion of “ecological holism” encompasses not only the natural world but also human beings, it is interesting to notice that the novel demonstrates the oneness of all religious traditions and simultaneously suggests non-discrimination in terms of gender. Like many other American male writers, Steinbeck tends to portray the encounter of a male protagonist with nature, as being that with a

female. As Annette Kolodny argues in The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (1975), such a portrayal of the land as female creates an unsuitable perception of nature as submissive and subservient to men who are conquerors of the natural world. Furthermore, Kolodny points out that humans destroy and exploit nature in the same way that men violate and abuse women. On the one hand, Steinbeck's portrayal of the male protagonist and nature corresponds with Kolodny's observation. On the other, it is important to note that the relationship of the male protagonist and the female natural world in Steinbeck's To a God Unknown is not permanently that of the conqueror and the conquered but of an inseparable union at the end of the novel. The land in Steinbeck's novel appears as a teacher whose lessons Joseph tries to understand; moreover, he has to spend his entire life in search of a perfect union with the land.

The end of the novel suggests that Joseph's oneness with nature necessitates the complementary qualities of the female and the male, that bestow upon him a new life. Joseph's discernment of his true identity in the scene of his death implies his non-discrimination between men and women. " 'I am the land' he said, 'and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while' " (366). Symbolically interpreted, these statements suggest his new identity which is comprised of female and male as embodied in the images of "the land" and "the rain" respectively. That is, the land can be associated with the mother's womb that nurtures the embryo or the seed of life while the rain can be related to sperm that are necessary in the process of procreation. Therefore, Joseph's realization that he will engender the grass points to his insight into the life-giving union of the male and the female. This attitude can also be seen in Joseph's statement in his marriage in nature: "[t]his is our marriage-- through the pass--entering the passage like sperm and egg that have become a single

unit of pregnancy” (232). In other words, new lives can be created only when one realizes and fulfils the inseparable tie between male and female qualities.

Apart from the symbolic interpretation, Joseph’s environmental awareness inspired by both his human father and the mother earth reflects the co-operation of the male and the female. In Joseph’s family background, his father, John Wayne, not only takes the role of father and mother, but also inculcates in Joseph the attitude of oneness with nature--a mind-set that establishes Joseph’s love for and responsibility to the natural world. In addition to his father’s role, mother earth helps shape his attitude of respect and his sense of duty to the natural world. As in the scene when he knows that his father is dying, Joseph recognizes that his father’s spirit will unite with mother earth: “his father and this new land were one” (180). Additionally, the union between Joseph’s human father and the mother earth suggests the co-existence of patriarchy and matriarchy. As Lester Marks points out, Joseph’s worship of the tree that he considers to be the dwelling place of his father’s spirit suggests the non-separation between the two systems in which either the male or the female is thought to be the leader of society (40). To explain this point, his worship of the tree implies the matriarchal system that deems the female as the head of the family while his respect for the father reflects patriarchy that regards the male as the master of the community.

In conclusion, Steinbeck’s idea of “ecological holism” is the oneness of human and the natural environment as well as that of humans and their social surroundings. Although this chapter separately discusses the two types of the environment--natural and social--for the sake of clarity, it is worth noting that they are, in reality, interwoven and closely knitted. Joseph’s union with nature helps him understand the unity of all religions and the co-operation of the two sexes. This non-

discriminatory attitude, in return, prompts him to recognize his kinship with the natural world. As Steinbeck examines social issues that are directly connected to the co-existence of people of different social groups, it can be said that the novel functions as a frame for what he sees as an ideal relationship between humans and their social environment. Moreover, Steinbeck presents this concept of wholeness to suggest a solution to environmental and social problems, resulting from the practices of differentiation between the human and the non-human world, as well as among people of different social groups, and of the consequent exploitation. Instead of highlighting an environmental crisis or social conflicts, Steinbeck focuses in To a God Unknown on the natural world as the teacher of Joseph's education and chooses to deal with the root of all conflicts, that is, a discriminatory and exploitative attitude towards nature as well as those who are different from oneself in terms of beliefs and gender.



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CHAPTER III

Ecological Exploitation in The Grapes of Wrath

In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck portrays the most serious tribulations in America in the 1930s: the natural disaster in Oklahoma and the migration of homeless tenant farmers to California. In the novel, the tenant farmers are economically forced to leave their farmland in Oklahoma and become very poor workers suffering from extreme poverty in California. Not only do these deprived workers have to endure hardships during their journey to the West but they also confront social prejudice and unfair treatment in California. The concrete images of socio-economic problems have invited a large number of critics to analyze this novel from a Marxist perspective and categorize it as a proletarian novel. For example, Peter Lisca's John Steinbeck, Nature and Myth (1978) considers the novel as the history of class struggle recorded from the working class's point of view. Moreover, Warren French's United States Authors Series: John Steinbeck (1961) argues that Steinbeck uses this novel as a way of criticizing the inefficiency and corruption of the government during the Great Depression. French asserts that political disorder intensifies socio-economic problems, especially capitalist exploitation of the proletariat. Next, George Bluestone's Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essay, The Grapes of Wrath (1972) focuses on Steinbeck's depiction of the ideal social order in the migrant groups and their utopian operation at the Government Camp. Bluestone points out that this new peaceful society serves as a solution to political and socio-economic troubles.

While socio-economic problems are of great importance in the novel, I want to argue that they are derived from and closely related to environmental problems.

Steinbeck suggests that the ignorant farmers' lack of ecological awareness results in their exploitation and the subsequent deterioration of the land. This environmental problem is the root cause of the socio-economic problems that these poor farmers are confronting. At the same time, the socio-economic problems further intensify the already existing environmental problem. These two problems are thus inseparably interwoven. In short, this chapter will examine Steinbeck's ecological awareness and his suggestions for solutions to these problems.

Applying ecocriticism in my analysis of the novel, I will moreover examine problems in the relationship between humans and the natural world in relation to conflicts among people of different social classes. In the previous chapter, I pointed out that Steinbeck presents his vision of the environment as an inseparable unit made up of both natural and social surroundings. This chapter will argue that Steinbeck considers the relationship among people in society as based on the same principle as the relationship between humans and the natural world. To be specific, the exploitation of nature is interwoven with social domination. Steinbeck first illustrates that the farmers' unawareness of the significance of land preservation results in both environmental and socio-economic problems in Oklahoma. Then, the capitalist view of nature as a mere commodity that they can profit from causes social and ecological exploitation in California. Furthermore, the fact that the socio-economic and ecological problems are closely knitted suggests the necessity of simultaneously tackling the two problems. In this novel, Steinbeck suggests the proper idea of land ownership, the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, the sustainable use of the land, and human kindness to one another as solutions to environmental and socio-economic problems.

Steinbeck first demonstrates that the natural disaster extensively devastates the fertility of the farmland in Oklahoma which causes the farmers to lose the profit that they could gain from the field. This natural disaster brings about the dispersion of the dirt by a strong wind which damages the entire plantation:

[l]ittle by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. . . . During a night the wind raced faster over the land, dug cunningly among the rootlets of the corn, and the corn fought the wind with its weakened leaves until the roots were freed by the prying wind. (3)

This image of the battle between the corn planted by humans and the strong wind can be interpreted as the struggle of the farmers against the natural world. The condition of the corn which is now “weakened” by the blustery wind represents human helplessness whereas the prevailing wind stands for the indifferent, destructive power of the natural world. The image of “each stalk” that “settled wearily sideways toward the earth and pointed the direction of the wind” (3) suggests that the farmers’ lives, together with their activities, are at nature’s mercy.

Although the dust storm reduces the productivity of the farmland, Steinbeck indicates that the farmers have so far been able to endure the adverse effects of the natural disasters. As Joel Hedgpeth explains, it is typical for the physical features of the country in Oklahoma to face natural disasters that are beyond human control, such as drought and dust storms (296). Even though the farmers are much afflicted by the dust storm, they do not lose their inner strength to overcome the hardship. The following portrayal of the farmers and their family also suggests that the natural disaster does not impair the wholeness of their family and community:

[m]en stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn. . . . The women studied the men’s faces secretly, for the corn could go, as long as

something else remained. The children stood near by, drawing figures in the dust with bare toes, and the children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break. (4)

The farmers here are depicted as capable of maintaining their roles as husband and wife as well as of parents and children. That is, men serve as leaders responsible for solving problems and making decisions whereas women and children who quietly observe the men function to support the men. Moreover, it is important to note that when men are able to restore their hope, they are likely to save their family from destruction:

[a]fter a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. . . . and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole. (4)

As these passages clearly indicate, it is a sense of spiritual security that sustains the farmers' spirits and helps them overcome the difficulties in their lives. This sense of wholeness is derived from an intimate relationship in the closely knit community of the farmers.

In the novel, Steinbeck makes it very clear that capitalism is one of the major factors that breaks up the relationship among people in society. Steinbeck portrays the bank, a financial institution which represents capitalism, as being in the full control of bank officers who are helplessly compelled to destroy the poor farmers' farmland: "[i]t happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, . . . It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it" (41). It can be noted that the writer criticizes the way in

which the bank reduces its officers to robots mindlessly depriving the poor farmers of their ownership of the land. As Thomas Sowell notes, the bank is like a monster that humans have created, but it now comes to rule their lives (16). Similarly, the financial company dehumanizes the land owners, forcing them to be cruel toward the farmers:

[s]ome of the owners men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves. (38)

That the bank makes the land owners mistreat the tenants suggests the idea of social domination. To illustrate this point, the capitalist system that allows the owners to exploit the farmers totally destroys the cordial relationship between the owners and the tenants. The writer further emphasizes the practice of social domination:

[t]hese last [order] would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time. Some of the owner men were a little proud to be slaves to such cold and powerful masters. (39)

The excerpt shows that the bank is now able to completely turn the landowners against the farmers. Their master and servant relationship suggests the power of the bank that manipulates both the owners and the tenants. It can therefore be concluded that the capitalist system dominates all groups of people in society: “[t]he monster isn’t men, but it can make men do what it wants” (42).

Additionally, Steinbeck illustrates how the capitalist system totally rejects interpersonal relations and thus destroys any possibility for human understanding. He depicts the bank as an unapproachable organization with which the tenant farmers

cannot make contact in order to open negotiations regarding their inability to return bank loans. The land owners tend to claim absolute authority of this impersonal institution while simultaneously presenting themselves as simply acting on its behalf. As the writer comments, “[i]f a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank--or the Company--needs--wants--insists--must have--as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them” (39). It is thus in the name of the financial institution that the owners violently force the tenant farmers to leave their homeland. This system also functions in the land company set up to legitimately drive the tenants from their farmland. For example, when the land owners coerces the farmers out of their land, he justifies his cruel treatment by claiming that his is acting under orders of the land company:

“[y]ou got to get off. It ain’t my fault.” . . . “It’s the Shawnee Lan’ an’ Cattle Company. I jus’ got orders.” “Who’s the Shawnee Lan’ an’ Cattle Company?” “It ain’t nobody. It’s a company.” “Got a fella crazy. There wasn’t nobody you could lay for. Lot a the folks jus’ got tired out looking for sompin to be mad at.” (59)

This statement suggests that the way in which the land company functions not only legitimizes the capitalist exploitation of the poor but also rids humans of their moral ability to sympathize with others. As part of the capitalist system, both the bank and the land company thus disallow any possibility for human personal contact and communication, thereby providing no outlet for humanity or compromise, which can possibly be created by means of interpersonal relations, to emerge. The tenant farmers are left capitalism’s desperate victims receiving neither understanding nor help from anybody.

While capitalism rejects personal relation, it also destroys the farmers’ sense of wholeness, a quality that once enabled the farmers to endure the destruction of the

natural disaster. Steinbeck presents how capitalist exploitation is much more demoralizing for the poor farmers than the ruin of the dust storm: “the men looked up for a second, and the smolder of pain was in their eyes. We got to get off. A tractor and a superintendent. Like factories” (42). At this moment, the spirits of the family leaders are shattered when the capitalists have taken over their farmland. Once the severance from their homeland is imposed on them, the farmers can no longer preserve the quality of wholeness that they once used to transform their disappointment into strength and anger in order to fight against hardships in their lives. This loss of the sense of wholeness has an effect not only on their spirits but also their family relationships:

[a]nd the women went quickly, quietly back into the houses and herded the children ahead of them. They knew that a man so hurt and so perplexed may turn in anger, even on people he loves. They left the men alone to figure and to wonder in the dust. (42)

As the men suffer from the painful reality that they are incapable of performing their duty as the protectors of their families, their wives become discouraged and worried that their men’s frustration may result in conflicts in the family. In other words, the situation can impair each individual’s morale and ruin familial relationships.

Furthermore, capitalism annihilates the relationship of people in the community. In the scene when the tractor comes to destroy the farmers’ house, Steinbeck portrays the tractor driver as one of the community members in Oklahoma who has turned against his own neighbours. One of the farmers criticizes the driver: “what you doing this kind of work for--against your own people? . . . for your three dollars a day fifteen or twenty families can’t eat at all. Nearly a hundred people have to go out and wander on the roads for your three dollars a day” (45). The statements

here suggest that the power of money can make people do anything even though it means having to break up their relationship with other people. As Jonathan Wolff points out, “[m]oney commodifies, transforms, and degrades human relations” (38). In the capitalist world, people become more self-interested, and thus the sense of humanity is ignored. The driver’s answer to his neighbour’s charge well illustrates this change:

[c]an’t think of that. Got to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes ever day. Times are changing, mister, don’t you know? Can’t make a living on the land unless you’ve got two, five ten thousand acres and a tractor. Crop land isn’t for little guys like us any more. . . . Well, crops are like that now. Nothing to do about it. You try to get three dollars a day some place. That’s the only way. (46)

The tractor driver’s statement points to the negative influence of capitalism on human beings. Capitalism degrades morality of the community members as it privileges the individual’s maximum profit over the community’s existence. Moreover, it destroys the rural community of farmers planting crops on their farmland, thereby breaking up the relationship of people in the countryside.

Not only does capitalism destroy relationships of people in society but it also breaks up the bond between humans and the natural world. In the novel, Steinbeck harshly criticizes capitalism as aiming solely at the highest benefits: “[t]hey [the bank] breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don’t get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so” (39). The capitalists’ sole concern with maximum profits leads to their view of nature as a mere commodity and thus their exploitation of the natural world. In V.D. Zotov’s words, “capitalism is ruthless in its treatment of nature” (46). The land holders’ greedy

desire to take over the tenant farmers' land to exploitatively make money out of it serves to demonstrate their ignorance of the relationship with the natural world: "[w]e've got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families the East would like to own a piece of land" (40). The owners' statement illustrates not only their view of nature as a source of material wealth but also their unawareness of the value of nature as the source of life. The capitalists' improper attitude toward the land disallows the kinship between humans and the natural world.

One way of looking at the capitalist attitude toward nature is to focus on the mastery of the capitalists over the natural world. Capitalism considers the land as a mere natural resource that humans can conquer and turn into their productive use. By way of illustration, Steinbeck presents the human attempt to overcome nature through the image of a tractor that ploughs the land: "[b]ehind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades--not plowing but surgery, pushing the cut earth to the right where the second row of disks cut it and pushed it to the left; slicing blades shining, polished by the cut earth" (44). The comparison between the tractor and the surgeon who operates on a patient suggests the way in which human beings try not only to change but also to destroy nature to serve their own purposes. It is also interesting to consider that the phrase "polished by the cut earth" can be interpreted as pointing to the sarcastic suggestion of nature as a slave and of the tractor as a powerful master. Moreover, the idea of the capitalists' dominion over nature is evident in the metaphor of the operation of the tractor as sexual exploitation: "the harrows combing with iron teeth so that the little clods broke up and the earth lay smooth. Behind the harrows, the long seeders--twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion" (44). The image of "the long seeders" that plough the land corresponds to the image of a

man's rape of a woman. The image suggests that the use of technology to manipulate the earth is as brutal as the crime of sexual violence. Even worse, the writer's implication that this case of sexual abuse is "methodically, raping without passion" can be interpreted as even more vicious than any other cases of violence. The victim, which is the earth, is repetitively raped by the tractor and is unable to free itself from this savage cycle.

Steinbeck also suggests that farming in the capitalist system totally ignores the bond between humans and the natural world. In the scene when the tractor ploughs the land, the writer criticizes the tractor driver's indifference to the land: "[h]e could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. He sat in an iron seat and stepped on iron pedals" (44). Here, there is no physical contact between the driver and the earth. This absence of touch results in human distance and alienation from nature. The driver whose life is driven by the lifeless force of the tractor--as suggested in the images of "an iron seat" and "iron pedals"--can only see nature as devoid of life. It is thus impossible for the driver to discern the life-giving power of the living earth. Moreover, the use of technological plantation disrupts the spiritual bond between humans and the natural world:

he [the driver] could not cheer or whip or curse or encourage himself. He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped did not germinate, it was nothing. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or drowned in flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than to the tractor. (44)

Since the capitalist system dehumanizes the tractor driver into a machine, the ideas of living nature, humans' oneness with the earth, as well as their reliance on and stewardship of the land are absolutely beyond the comprehension of the robot-like

driver. According to Horst Groene, “the use of machinery in agriculture is strongly condemned: machines sever the emotional bond between [m]an and [n]ature, which can only exist where farmers till the soil with their own hands” (130).

Not only does the capitalist system annihilate the tie between the tractor driver and the natural world but it also disrupts the connection between consumers and natural products purchased from the market. In the novel, Steinbeck criticizes the way in which consumers have no understanding about the origin of their food:

when that crop grew, and was harvested, no man had crumbled a hot clod in his fingers and let the earth sift past his fingertips. No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses.
(44)

In the capitalist system, the natural world is reduced to simply raw materials to be processed in order to supply the demand of the market. In the same way as the tractor driver is totally unaware of the bond between himself and the land, it is almost impossible for consumers who spend money buying food that they have not planted to feel their tie with the land or even a sense of gratitude toward the food or Mother Earth. This fact leads to the conclusion that capitalism completely destroys the relationship between humans and the natural world.

I have so far demonstrated how the natural disaster and capitalism play major roles in the destruction of the tenant farmers and their farmland in Oklahoma. However, I will also argue that the devastating effect of the dust storm and the farmers’ socio-economic failure originate from the farmers’ lack of ecological

awareness. In the scene when the land owners demand that the tenants leave their farmland, their conversation reveals the farmers' ecological ignorance:

[t]he owner men sat in the cars and explained. You [the tenants] know the land is poor. You've scabbled at it long enough, God knows. . . . The squatters nodded--they knew, God knew. If they could only rotate the crops they might pump blood back into the land. (39)

Here, it should be noted that the deterioration of the land is not caused by the farmers' inability to bring back fertility to nature, but it comes from their lack of awareness of the importance of land preservation. Although the farmers have realized that crop rotation, which is a basic way to restore their farmland after plantation, can help prevent the land from destruction, they continue to exploit the land without trying to revitalize it. When the farmers confront this real damage of their farmland, it is too late to them to repair the condition of the natural world.

It is worth noting that the farmers' loss of their farmland is primarily caused by their misuse of the land. Steinbeck further criticizes, through the voice of the land owners, the farmers' monocropping system that devastates the productivity of the field: "[t]he owner men went on leading to their point: You know the land's getting poorer. You know what cotton does to the land; robs it, sucks all the blood out of it" (39). This speech highlights to the farmers' mistreatment of the land; that is, they have raised a particular type of plant, such as corn or cotton, for a very long period. This monocropping gradually causes the soil condition to deteriorate year after year, finally making the land permanently futile and unproductive. Moreover, Steinbeck explains that the farmers' practice of the monocropping system arises from their imitation of their ancestors' practice and their own desire to gain benefit from the land. One of the characters discusses his family's tradition of farming: "[e]ver' year I

can remember, we had a good crop comin', an't it never come. Grampa says she was good the first five plowin's, while the wild grass was still in her" (34). This statement suggests that the farmers' ancestors tended to plant the same crop for five consecutive years. This is the tradition of farming that the farmers have followed. The statement also points out that the farmers and their ancestors were not without realization that the land will remain productive for only a short period. However, their ancestors' unawareness of the necessity for land protection causes them to ignore the land.

Moreover, it is the farmers' desire to earn a high selling price for a particular type of crop that induces them to continue the monocropping system. In their attempt to tackle their financial problems, the tenant farmers simply decide to continue to raise the same crop and wait for a higher price in the following year:

[c]an't we just hang on? Maybe the next year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars--God knows what price cotton will bring. Don't they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton'll hit the ceiling. Next year, maybe. (39)

This quotation demonstrates not only the farmers' shortsightedness but also their greed and self-interest. Their wish for a prolonged period of war which may increase the cotton price indicates their selfishness and their profit-oriented minds as well as their inability to realize that agriculture is a life-giving activity, not a destructive one.

Another example that demonstrates how the farmers overlook the significance of land preservation is when they ignore the government officers' suggestion about the sustainable use of the land. In the scene when the farmers discuss the poor condition of the land damaged by the dust storm, they express their regret about having unintentionally mistreated the natural world: "I don't know what it's coming to, they said. The country's spoilt. It'll come back though, maybe we sinned some

way we didn't know about" (253). Although the farmers still believe that the land will restore itself just like in the old times, the severe effect of the natural disaster on the land prompts them to question what wrong they have done to the land. They are eventually come to a realization that the destruction of nature has been caused by their misuse of the land. One of the tenant farmers shares his experience of how he abuses the land:

[f]ella says to me, gov'ment fella, an' he says, she's gullied up on ya. Gov'ment fella. He says, if ya plowed 'cross the contour, she won't gully. Never did have no chance to try her. An' the new super' ain't plowin' 'cross the contour. Running' a furrow four miles long that ain't stoppin' or goin' aroun' Jesus Christ Hissself. (253)

This speech indicates that the farmers have neglected the advice of the government officers to plough across the contour in order to prevent gully erosion. Since, for a long time, the farmers have repeatedly made furrows along the land slopes, it is easier for the rain to destroy the upper level of the soil. When the storm comes, the soil washed away by water is dispersed by the storm, resulting in the dust storm. This mistreatment of the land thus causes the dust storm to be even more devastating. The farmers' problem here corresponds with David Cassuto's point that a region's environmental troubles are primarily caused by its local agricultural mismanagement (64).

In addition to the ploughing method, the farmers' destruction of the grassland is another important factor that degrades the land. This improper treatment of the land destroys the roots of the grass that hold the productive topsoil: "[t]he squatting tenant men nodded and wondered and drew figures in the dust, and yes, they knew, God knows. If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil, it might not be so bad" (39). As Cassuto explains,

[b]y the 1930s, [p]lains farmers had plowed under virtually all the region's grassland. Without sod and other vegetation to hold the topsoil in place, the land became extremely vulnerable to ecological disturbance. When the drought hit, the land had no natural defenses with which to keep its topsoil intact. The resulting dust storms stripped the land bare. Yet if the region had retained its indigenous vegetation, the drought would have had little long-term effect on the land. (64)

Similar to the previous case of land misuse, the destruction of the grassland worsens the effect of the dust storm. Again, the farmers have realized that the more they damage the land, the more severe the consequence of the natural disaster will inevitably be. However, they have done nothing to protect the land. This fact leads to the conclusion that the farmers' unsustainable use of the land is a source of both environmental and socio-economic problems.

Interestingly, the destruction of the grassland by the farmers can be seen as similar to the exploitation of the working class by the capitalists. Metaphorically, the grass roots that protect the fertility of the land can be compared to people at the grassroots level that sustain the power of the nation. As the working class, which is the biggest group in society, has a powerful role to maintain the strength of the country, the destruction of this group unavoidably brings about the instability of the nation. It is impossible for the upper class to have a sustainable development of the nation when they have destroyed grassroots people. The farmers express their anger and bitterness of being exploited by the capitalists: "[w]e could have saved you, but you cut us down, and soon you will be cut down and there'll be none of us to save you" (110). Steinbeck realizes that the destruction of the farmers will widen the gap between different social groups and thus result in serious socio-economic problems.

As the root cause of the farmers' problems, their unawareness of the importance of land preservation manifests itself in their mistreatment of the land which in turn aggravates the already devastating effect of the natural disaster. Subsequently suffering from failures in farming and the deterioration of the land, the farmers become easily victimized by capitalist exploitation. The other serious effect of all these complicated problems is the collapse of traditional agrarian life. In the novel, the selling out of tenant farmers' farming tools when they have to leave the farmland symbolizes the end of their rural life when they are forced to become migrant workers: "[f]ifty cents isn't enough to get for a good plow. That seeder cost thirty-eight dollars. Two dollars isn't enough. Can't haul it all back--Well, take it, and a bitterness with it. Take the well pump and the harness. Take halters, collars, hames, and tugs" (109). The farmers now completely desert their rustic lives and their farming activities. Steinbeck here emphasizes in this scene that the capitalists rob them not only of their homeland but also their life-giving agricultural utensils.

The collapse of traditional agrarian life leads to the homeless migrants' emotional insecurity, manifested in feelings of displacement, disorientation, and alienation. At a time when the farmers have to leave their home for an unfamiliar place, they feel desperately lonely:

[h]ow'll it be not to know what land's outside the door? How if you wake up in the night and know and *know* the willow tree's not there? Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't. The willow tree is you.

The pain on that mattress there--that dreadful pain--that's you. (112)

This excerpt vividly portrays the farmers' profound relationship with their homeland. "The willow tree" represents the natural environment at their homeland that has shaped their identity and reassured their safety. When they have to be far away from

home, their spirits is shattered and broken. They greatly suffer from the loss of their homeland.

Steinbeck also suggests that the loss of the farmers' farmland leads to the loss of their identity. The traditional agrarian life that is attached to the earth encourages the farmers to identify themselves with the land. When these people have to leave their land, it means that their sense of self is completely broken. One of the peasant farmers, Muley Graves, regards his homeland as his cultural roots: "there's the place down by the barn where Pa got gored to death by a bull. An' his blood is right in that groun', right now. Mus' be. Nobody never washed it out. An' I put my han' on that groun' where my own pa's blood is part of it" (64). To Muley Graves, the memory of the place where the spirit of his father remains is part of his own identity. To him, the existence of his homeland has a power to bring him back to his cultural ancestry. That the land contains his and his family's lives as well as his past makes it impossible for Muley to desert his homeland even if he is pursued by the land owners. Moreover, Steinbeck suggests that since the land is the farmers' lives, the loss of their homeland has a great influence on their lives. Muley's statement about the loss of farmland serves to illustrate this point: "[p]lace where folks live is them folks. They ain't whole, out lonely on the road in a piledd-up car. They ain't alive no more" (65). His comment on the separation of the farmers from their farmland, which seriously hurts both people and the land, suggests the idea of an inseparable union between humans and the natural world. That is, the farmers' desertion of the homeland is as if they were living in death.

Steinbeck illustrates that the farmers' journey to the West has destroyed their traditional agrarian lives. In the novel, the author sympathetically depicts the effect of the migration on the farmers' way of life. First of all, they are deprived of their

identity as farmers whose lives are closely tied to the land. When they depart from their homeland in Oklahoma, the writer points out that: “[t]hey were not farm men any more, but migrant men” and adds that “the thought, the planning, the long staring silence that had gone out to the fields, went now to the roads, to the distance, to the West” (250). Moreover, the migrant life that is alien to these farmers and their serious concern about their journey draw their lives and minds away from the land. This excerpt indicates that the farmers who have once lived in harmony with the natural world now become estranged from their old way of lives. Their relationship with nature is thus destroyed.

Social problems and the exploitation of nature in California arise from the same cause as the socio-economic and ecological troubles in Oklahoma. Steinbeck demonstrates that the capitalists’ view of nature as a mere commodity and their lack of environmental awareness bring about not only their land abuse but also the exploitation of poor farmers and workers on the farm. From the capitalist viewpoint, nature is reduced to a source of profit: “crops were reckoned in dollars, and land was valued by principal plus interest, and crops were bought and sold before they were planted. Then crop failure, drought, and flood were no longer little deaths within life, but simple losses of money” (297). The excerpt indicates the influence of capitalism on the Californians’ money-oriented attitude toward farming. Since they are blind to the value of nature as life-giving and to the significance of human stewardship of the land, they greedily turn to agribusiness as a quick means to benefit from the land as much as possible. Steinbeck criticizes the agribusiness as inducing the unlimited exploitation of the natural world: “the crops changed. Fruit trees took the place of

grain fields, and vegetables to feed the world spread out on the bottoms; lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes” (297). This profit-oriented farming has come to supersede self-sufficient agriculture and destroy the farmers’ traditional agrarian life and their harmonious co-existence with nature.

Moreover, Steinbeck criticizes the scientific manipulation of nature that ignores the interconnectedness of the ecosystem. In the novel, Steinbeck portrays scientists as attempting to find ways of increasing crop yield: “[a]ll California quicken with produce, and the fruit grows heavy. . . . Behind the fruitfulness are men of understanding and knowledge and skill, men who experiment with seed” (442). Although Steinbeck seems to wonder at the human genius in the scientific development of crop breeding, his depiction of these scientists as focusing solely on increasing the amount of crops produced points to his criticism of their greed. Furthermore, the way in which the scientists are “endlessly developing the techniques for greater crops of plants whose roots will resist the million enemies of the earth: the molds, the insects, the rusts, the blights” (442) can be considered as disrupting the web of relations in the ecosystem in which all living beings and organisms are dependently interrelated. The scientists’ ambitious attempt to “perfect the seed” and “the roots” (442) here reveals not only their lack of ecological understanding but also their dominion over nature. Since the scientists view nature as simply an object of study, they tend to see it to be disconnected from them. This mindset makes them abuse the natural world endlessly.

More examples that illustrate the capitalists’ lack of ecological awareness are evident in the excessive use of dangerous chemicals to increase crops in the field and to ferment fruit in the wine factories. In the former case, the capitalists employ sulphur to get rid of pests: “there are the men of chemistry who spray the trees against

pests, who sulphur the grapes, who cut out disease and rots, mildews and sicknesses” (442). This use of the inorganic substance is a non-holistic treatment of nature. Although sulphur can get rid of pests quickly and effectively, it causes acid rain, which has a hazardous side effect on both the natural environment and human beings. As for the latter case, the wine makers neglect the effect of the excessive use of chemicals to ferment fruit in the factories. In the story, the capitalists use low-quality grapes to make wine and add substances to stimulate the fermentation of the grapes: “[r]ip the grapes from the vines, good grapes, rotten grapes, wasp-stung grapes. Press stems, press dirt and rot. But there’s mildew and formic acid in the vats. Add sulphur and tannic acid” (443). Here, Steinbeck implicitly criticizes the wine makers for ignoring the dangerous consequences of mildew, formic acid, sulphur and tannic acid on their customers. Moreover, Steinbeck points out that the use of chemicals causes air pollution, one of the most hazardous results of which the chemists are not aware: “the decaying mash in the wine vats is poisoning the air. And taste the wine--no grape flavor at all, just sulphur and tannic acid and alcohol” (444). Because of their ecological ignorance and profit-oriented attitude, the capitalists cause the detrimental effects on both humans and the natural environment.

Furthermore, Steinbeck alleges that the capitalists transform nature only to satisfy humans’ insatiable desires and to serve the market’s demand. As the writer states,

[t]hey [the chemists] have transformed the world with their knowledge. . . . that old grape that grew among the trees and fed the birds its tiny fruit has mothered a thousand varieties, red and black, green and pale pink, purple and yellow; and each variety with its own flavor. (443)

The modification of nature points to a view of nature as being created to serve humans alone and humans' excessive confidence in their ability to take control of nature. The role of the chemists here is to dominate nature and Steinbeck compares their task's to that of the doctors': "[d]octors of preventive medicine, men at the borders who look for fruit flies, for Japanese beetle, men who quarantine the sick trees and root them out and burn them" (442). Steinbeck seems to praise the chemists portrayed as the doctors who help treat the sick trees. However, he also insinuates that the chemists' attempt to improve and modify nature is primarily intended to help the capitalists gain the highest benefits from the field.

It is important to note that the capitalists' profit-oriented agriculture and their lack of ecological awareness result not only in their exploitation of nature but in social exploitation as well. In light of Steinbeck's concept of the environment as comprising both natural and social surroundings, these two problems are interrelated. The capitalists' mastery of nature is accompanied by their exploitation of human beings as they also apply the exploitative attitude toward nature in their dealings with the underprivileged. For example, the capitalists who own fruit canneries eventually take over the traditional farmers' small farmland:

as cannery owner he [the capitalist] paid himself a low price for the fruit and kept the price of canned goods up and took his profit. And the little farmers who owned no canneries lost their farms, and they were taken by the great owners, the banks, and the companies. (363)

Since the land owners buy fruit canneries and cut the fruit price to below the cost of growing it, the local farmers get into debt, lose their farmland and finally become migrant workers. This vicious business strategy reflects the capitalists' exploitative

attitude toward the impoverished farmers. Another group of people that the land owners exploit is foreign labour whom they can hire at low wages. Steinbeck compares the land owners' treatment of minority workers to the practice of slavery: "[n]ow farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it. They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves; Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos" (297). In fact, the land owners' idea that it is legitimate to take advantage of the lower class is similar to their view of nature as subject to human use. They are therefore able to abuse anything—human and non-human—in order to gain the maximum benefit. Their exploitation of workers is based upon the same principle as that of nature.

Steinbeck further elucidates that the exploitative view of nature and other people also results in conflicts between the Oklahoma migrants and the Californians. The Californians' lack of ecological awareness prevents them from realizing the interdependence and cooperation among people of different social groups, resulting in their strong discrimination against those poor migrants. In California, the relationships of people in society are totally founded upon the profit that they can make from one another. The writer explains why the Californians dislike the migrants from Oklahoma:

[t]he owners hated them. And in the towns, the storekeepers hated them because they had no money to spend. . . . The town men, little bankers, hated Okies because there was nothing to gain from them. They had nothing. And the laboring people hated Okies because a hungry man must work, and if he must work, if he has to work, the wage payer automatically gives him less for his work; and then no one can get more. (299)

In the Californians' view, the migrants bring no benefit and deprive them of the profits that should have belonged to them. This view can point to the capitalist view

of money as the most important thing in life. This attitude causes bias, conflict and, eventually, the disintegration of people of different groups in the same community. The writer also emphasizes that local people have strong prejudice against Oklahoma migrants. The Californians view them as “dirty and ignorant,” accusing them of being “degenerate, sexual maniacs” or “thieves” who have “no sense of property rights” (362). To the Californians, the migrants whom they call “Okies” threaten to destroy the safety and security of the state.

The Californian capitalists’ abuse of nature and humans arises from their view of the environment as being apart from themselves and valued only for its use to them. In the novel, Steinbeck uses irony as a way of highlighting the interweaving of environmental and social problems caused by the separation between humans and nature as well as dissociation among people in society. For example, Steinbeck criticizes the situation in which the Californian capitalists take over an enormous amount of unused land whereas the workers and migrants are homeless. One of the migrant workers bitterly expresses his anger when describing the productive land that now belongs to the land owners:

you’ll pass lan’ flat an’ fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan’s layin’ fallow. But you can’t have none of that lan’ That’s a Lan’ and Cattle Company. An’ if they don’t want ta work her, she ain’t gonna git worked. You go in there an’ plant you a little corn, an’ you’ll go to jail!
(262)

Here, the narrator pits the Cattle Company’s ownership of the vast land against the poor condition of the migrants in need of a small field. When the migrants furtively plant crops on the owners’ land, the capitalists arrest them and put them in jail. It is possible that the land owners only think that the possession of the land helps guarantee their wealth. Due to their ignorance, they are thus unable to realize that the

land left unused may become barren. Moreover, they ignore the impoverished condition of people who are desperately in need of a place to live. As Steinbeck suggests, the capitalists' ecological unconcern brings about social conflicts between the capitalists and the proletariat in California.

Another irony that illustrates how the capitalists' ecological unawareness worsens the already existing social conflicts is in the scene when they destroy produce crops to control fruit prices while the workers and migrants are starving to death:

[t]he works of the roots of the vines, of the trees, must be destroyed to keep up the price, and this is the saddest, bitterest thing of all. . . . And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit. (444)

The excerpt highlights the contrast between the capitalists' abundance and the migrants' abject poverty. More importantly, that the capitalists destroy large amounts of fruit demonstrates their view of crops as supply in the market, their ecological ignorance and their lack of compassion for others' suffering. Blinding to the notion of nature as having an intrinsic value and existing in an intricate web of interrelationship, the capitalists see nature merely as the inexhaustible source of profit. They are unable to discern the crops as life-sustaining blessings. On the contrary, to them, these agricultural products provide them with increasing material wealth. With their acquisitive and selfish mind, they are also oblivious to the painful condition of the starving migrants which they could help alleviate.

Steinbeck particularly emphasizes the detrimental effects of the capitalists' lack of environmental concern on the poor working class. Toward the end of the novel, he demonstrates how the working class' physical and mental conditions are crushed by the capitalists' exploitation of their environment:

children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. . . . in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage. (445)

The “failure” of local people to see this situation is characterized by the paradox of the stunning advancement of agricultural technology and the reality that the poor die of undernourishment and starvation. Moreover, Steinbeck employs the image of “the grapes of wrath” to criticize the dreadful consequence of the capitalists’ ecological and social abuse. The picture of the grapes that symbolize both produced crops and the workers’ anguish suggests the idea that the exploitation of nature is interwoven with social domination. The depiction of the growing grapes as the rise of the migrants’ rage also illustrates the accumulation of the workers’ afflictions and anger caused by the capitalists’ inhumane exploitation for a long period of time. Finally, this image can be interpreted as implying the self-destructiveness of the owners’ enormous wealth that comes from their abuse of workers and the natural world.

Steinbeck points out that since the environmental and social troubles are closely related, it is necessary to solve these two problems concurrently. While the preceding sections of this chapter focused on the connection between the ecological and social crises in Oklahoma and in California, this section examines the writer’s answers to both ecological and social problems. Steinbeck demonstrates in the novel that the peasant farmers from Oklahoma try to restore their relationships among their groups as well as their association with the natural world. This effort points to the necessity of solving the two problems together. Moreover, the writer presents the idea of a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, the sustainable use of the land and

compassion to fellow humans as effective ways of solving the environmental and social problems. These solutions help not only create environmental awareness but also avoid ecological and social exploitation.

Although the bond among human beings and the kinship between the farmers and the land is broken, the migrant farmers attempt to re-establish their relationship with other people and the land during their journey to California. To restore their sense of self and to reconstruct their family's union, the Joads, one of the families, who are forced to leave their homeland in Oklahoma, take refuge in the truck:

[t]he family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. The ancient Hudson, with bent and scarred radiator screen, with grease in dusty globules at the worn edges of every moving part, with hub caps gone and caps of red dust in their places--this was the new hearth, the living center of the family. (127)

Now that the farmland which the Joads used to regard as the centre of their lives is devastated, they have turned to the truck, which now functions as "the new hearth" and "the living center of the family." It is worth noting that the farmers transfer their bond with the living land to the truck and attributes "the living principle" to the latter, which is, in fact, an inanimate object. The truck thus becomes a living source of power and strength that helps tie the family members together. This new meaning that the farmers have given to the truck enables them to restore the quality of wholeness. Here, Steinbeck suggests that it is necessary for these homeless people to have something that their spirit can truly fall back on at such a critical time.

Once the Joads can restore a sense of solidarity to their family, their leader is also able to perform his duty with regained strength and confidence. Whereas most family leaders have lost self-esteem as they are incapable of protecting the family and

the land from natural destruction and capitalist exploitation, the Joads is one of the few families whose leader is able to retain his inner strength and serve well as the pillar of the family. The relationship of Grandpa and the Joad family members is depicted in the scene of their meeting before leaving home:

Grampa came out of the house and saw the two squatting together, and he jerked over and sat on the running board of the truck, facing them. That was the nucleus. Tom and Connie and Noah strolled in and squatted, and the line was a half-circle with Grampa in the opening. (127)

This scene suggests that the Joads deem Grandpa as “the nucleus” or the centre of the family. Grandpa’s status as “nucleus” part is indispensable for all family members because it creates a sense of order and reinforces their unity. At the same time, the deep respect that he gains from his followers strengthens his morale, making him more fully aware of his responsibility for his family. However, Steinbeck emphasizes that the role of the head undergoes changes during this time of crisis: “Grampa was still the titular head, but he no longer ruled. His position was honorary and a matter of custom” (129). On the one hand, the Joads’ acceptance of Grandpa as “the titular head” points to their respect for the elders and traditional values. On the other, the changing situation calls for a more democratic spirit. Now the head has no absolute power to rule. Instead, each member needs to take part in the family’s decision-making.

Additionally, Steinbeck focuses on the importance of motherhood as the upholder of family kinship. While Grandpa’s role as the leader is largely symbolic, Ma’s role as the protector of the family is practical. The portrayal of Ma Joad helps illustrate this point:

[h]er full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain

and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken. (93)

All qualities of perfect motherhood--strength, wisdom, compassion, and serenity--are embodied in the character of Ma. The comparison of Ma to “the citadel of the family” and “the strong place that could not be taken” also suggests her crucial role as the invincible person who supports and shelters the whole family. Furthermore, Steinbeck emphasizes Ma’s three important roles that help sustain the family:

[a]nd from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess. (94)

First, she is the role model of a respectable woman who all family members highly respect. Next, Ma is considered as a healer who is able to cure family illnesses. Her healing gesture which is “sure and cool and quiet” also indicates her confidence and composure. Last, Ma is capable of being a judge who resolves family conflicts. The comparison of Ma to the goddess of justice suggests her fairness and authority. Steinbeck also stresses that the existence of the family depends on Ma alone: “[s]he seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone” (94).

The fact that Ma’s qualities of perfect motherhood help support the family is evident in several scenes. For example, after Grandpa’s death during the journey, Ma Joad is able to fully occupy his position as the centre of the family. Or when her son, Tom, decides to stay behind to fix the car of the Wilsons, the family that the Joads travel with during their trip to the West, Ma insists that the family wait for Tom and

always stay together: “[w]hat we got lef’ in the worl’? Nothin’ but us. Nothin’ but the folks. We come out an’ Grampa, he reached for the shovel-shelf right off. An’ now right off, you wanna bust up the folks--” (216). What Ma is saying here is that the only thing that they have and will not let go is “folks,” which include not only their immediate family members but also other people that are in a similar plight. In another scene, Ma similarly emphasizes that the survival and unity of her family is the most precious thing in her life: “[a]ll we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain’t scared while we’re all here, all that’s alive, but I ain’t gonna see us bust up” (217). To Ma Joad, the wholeness of her “folks” means the only possibility for their survival.

Just Pa and Ma try to sustain their family’s togetherness, the migrant farmers also seek to establish their cordial relationship with other people during their journey to the West. These homeless migrants tend to help and support each other both on the road and in the camp:

because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they share their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. (247)

The migrant farmers now share all they have not only with their family members but also other people who face the same destiny. This sense of sharing encourages everyone in the migrant camp to merge together into a single group:

[i]n the evening a strange thing happened; the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and

awestruck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. (247)

In other words, the migrants belong to the same family. Their oneness arises from their shared experiences: the desperate departure from homeland, the dream vision of the West, the sadness of their children's illnesses and the joy of their childbirth. To Steinbeck, not only do this sense of sharing and unity help release the migrants' suffering during the journey but they also strengthen their minds and empower them as a unified group. As Steinbeck remarks, "[t]his is the beginning--from 'I' to 'we' " (193). The writer suggests that it is crucial for these people to establish close relationship within their group to fight against social exploitation.

The unity of the migrant farmers makes possible the beginning of a new community in which everybody has rights and duties in the camp. Steinbeck points out the rights that the migrants believe that they are entitled to: "the right of privacy in the tent," "the right to talk and to listen," and "the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights" (248). These rights reflect the equal relationships among the migrant farmers, the democratic practice among the community members and the humanity that these people highly value. Moreover, living in this new community in the camping area prompts the farmers to restore the traditional roles of each family member:

when the cars pulled into the camping places, each member had his duty and went to it without instruction: children to gather wood, to carry water; men to pitch the tents and bring down the beds; women to cook the supper and to watch while the family fed. And this was done without command. The families, which had been units of which the boundaries were a house at night, a farm by day, changed their boundaries. In the long hot light, they were silent in the cars moving slowly westward; but at night they integrated with any group they found. (250)

The way in which the migrants are responsible for their jobs—for example, children's little task of finding wood and water, men's difficult work of building a tent, and women's domestic work, such as cooking food—represents the traditional value of family and all members' mutual cooperation. It can be said that this activity that they were familiar with in their lives in Oklahoma help restore relationships among family members.

While the migrants attempt to re-establish relationships among themselves during the journey to the West, they simultaneously try to restore their connection with the natural world. Since the migrants have to camp by the road at night, they have an opportunity to be in touch with the land, which they use as a camping place: “[a] certain physical pattern is needed for the building of a world—water, a river bank, a stream, a spring, or even a faucet unguarded. And there is needed enough flat land to pitch the tents, a little brush or wood to build the fires” (249). Each night, the migrants depend upon the natural world—for example, a river bank, a stream, and the flat land—to establish their temporary community. This reliance upon the natural world helps preserve their traditional agrarian lives tied to the earth. It can thus be said that the formation of the migrants' close relationships is intertwined with the rebuilding of their kinship with the natural environment.

Furthermore, the migrants resort to the natural world as a place of relaxation and entertainment. In the scene when the migrants in the camp enjoy story-telling and listening to stories, Steinbeck employs the pastoral image of these homeless peasants relaxing themselves in the natural surroundings: “[a]nd it [amusement] came about in the camps along the roads, on the ditch banks beside the streams, under the

sycamores, that the story teller grew into being, so that the people gathered in the low firelight to hear the gifted ones” (415). This image suggests the pastoral idea of the carefree peasant’s peaceful country life in harmony with nature. Nature as a source of delight helps sustain the spirit of the migrants. Moreover, that this leisure activity takes place in natural environs points to the migrants’ attempt to re-establish relationships among themselves and with the natural world at the same time.

Steinbeck also suggests that the migrants’ longing for their relationship with nature encourages them to re-establish their union with the natural world. Although this feeling is shared by everybody in the camp, the extreme case is Noah, the elder child of the Joads, who decides during the camp to leave his family to stay near the river. Noah expresses his yearning to return to the natural world where his spirit can be revived: “[I]ike to jus’ stay here. Like to lay here forever. Never get hungry an’ never get sad. Lay in the water all life long, lazy as a brood sow in the mud” (260). Noah’s wish to release his tormented feelings from the trip reflects his attitude to nature as being a physical and spiritual shelter. The migrant life which is far beyond the richness of nature makes Noah want to return to peaceful living along the river: “I ain’t a-gonna leave this here water. I’m a-gonna walk on down this here river. . . . Get myself a piece a line. I’ll catch fish. Fella can’t starve beside a nice river” (266). The fact that he chooses his life near the river instead of his family suggests his inseparable union with nature and strong determination to restore his kinship with the natural world.

It is important to note that the connection between the re-establishment of the relationship among the farmers and their restoration of the kinship with nature suggests that the social and environmental crises have to be carefully considered together. Since the social conflicts arise from the humans’ lack of humanity toward

the land and other people, the proletariat's political movement and the capitalists' use of violence are not effective ways to solve the problems. In the novel, Steinbeck points out the impracticality of the working class' union organizers and the inefficiency of the owners' use of violence:

every effort of the great owners was directed at repression. The money was spent for arms, for gas to protect the great holdings, and spies were sent to catch the murmuring of revolt so that it might be stamped out. The changing economy was ignored, plans for the change ignored; and only means to destroy revolt were considered, while the causes of revolt went on. (305)

Whereas the proletariat tries to establish their labour union to rebel against the capitalists to call for their social welfare, the capitalists employ weapons to brutally destroy those radical workers and their union organizers. The confrontation between these two opposite sides intensifies the problems. Since this socialist movement focuses simply on the treatment of the consequence, not its causes, it will thus be impossible for these people to solve these social conflicts.

In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck proposes the harmonious relationship between humans and nature as one of the solutions to the ecological and social problems. It is necessary for humans to realize that the source of the problem is their ecological unawareness. The solution therefore should be the adjustment of their understanding of the natural world. One of the sustainable means of solving the problems is the proper idea of land ownership. As Steinbeck suggests through the voice of a farmer, land ownership is founded on a person's identification with the land:

[i]f a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it

and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. (46)

The farmers' perception of the land as their life, their identity and the source of their self-esteem corresponds with Joseph's ideal vision of the land in To a God Unknown. This positive sense of land possession precedes intimate love and great responsibility for the natural world. One may conclude that the idea of land ownership has to be accompanied by a sense of care and duty. Moreover, the portrayal of the farmers' farming in the field suggests the harmonious relationship between humans and the land: "[t]his here boy been married to that there little digger. . . . The soil loosened ahead of him. The sun cleared the fruit trees now and the grape leaves were golden green on the vines" (379). That Steinbeck romanticizes man's kinship with the beautiful earth as the intimate relationship between husband and wife reflects his belief in the possibility of the peaceful and harmonious living between humans and the natural world. It can also be possible to assert that this vision of nature and the union with the land will protect human beings from ecological exploitation.

More significantly, Steinbeck points out self-sufficient agriculture as a way to effectively solve both socio-economic and environmental problems. In the scene when one of the migrant farmers criticizes the monocropping system in the Californian capitalist's agribusiness, his statement suggests the usefulness of self-sufficient agriculture:

[t]here's thirty thousan' acres, out west of here. Layin' there. Jesus, what I could do with that, with five acres of that! Why, hell, I'd have ever'thing to eat. Notice one thing? They ain't no vegetables nor chickens nor pigs at the farms. They raise one thing--cotton, say, or peaches, or lettuce. 'Nother place'll be all chickens. They buy the stuff they could

raise in the dooryard. Jesus, what I could do with a couple pigs. . . .
 Christ, I could git enough potatoes off'n that little patch to feed my whole
 family. (301)

The farmer's vision of his and his family's lives on a small farmland here suggests the advantages of sustainable self-sufficient agriculture. First, planting multiple crops helps preserve the productivity of the soil. Then, by growing various kinds of plant and raising domestic animals like chickens and pigs on their own farm, the farmers can produce their own food and thus cut down their expenses. Next, this sustainable farming will free the farmers from financial debt. Consequently, the farmers will not be forced to leave their homeland and to become workers in the town. In addition, this traditional agrarian life will allow people to live harmoniously with nature. As Murray Bookchin asserts, "[s]ustainable agriculture is seen not as a collection of solutions to specific farming problems, but as part of a lifestyle in which both humans and their natural surroundings can live free from dependence on dominating institutions and practices" (245).

Apart from the proper idea of land ownership and self-sufficient agriculture, the relationship among humans is as important as that between humans and nature. In the latter part of the novel, the writer points out that although the migrant farmers have greatly suffered from the Californians' abuse, they are able to maintain their spirit and fight against these dreadful conditions because of the wholeness of the family:

[t]he women watched the men, watched to see whether the break had come at last. The women stood silently and watched. And where a number of men gathered together, the fear went from their faces, and anger took its place. And the women sighed with relief, for they knew it was all right--

the break had not come; and the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath. (553)

The family leaders' ability to transform fear and disappointment into anger indicates that there is still power and hope in their families. The men's strength helps preserve the feeling of love, the sense of wholeness, and the good relationships among family members. This concern and responsibility among family members allows them the possibility to extend their help and support to other people in society. It can thus be said that family is a basic social institution where people learn to foster their love and care for other people.

In the social and political conflicts as presented in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck suggests that it is important for us to expand our love beyond our immediate family members to other people. Throughout the novel, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon learn to develop their love and kinship not only for their family members but also for other human fellows. Ma Joad's refusal to allow the priest to inscribe Biblical words on Grandpa's epigraph indicates that she defines family kinship from blood relations. Ma also gives her first priority to her family when she wishes not to share any food with other children in the migrant camp. Similar to Ma Joad, her daughter, Rose of Sharon, always thinks of herself and her husband: "[t]he world had drawn close around them, and they were in the center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it, with Connie making a small orbit about her" (164). Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, Ma and Rose of Sharon have fully developed their limitless love and care for other people. They blend their own family with the Wainwrights in the migrant camp: "[n]ow, without the separation, the two families in the car were one" (554). Moreover, they also save the old man from starvation.

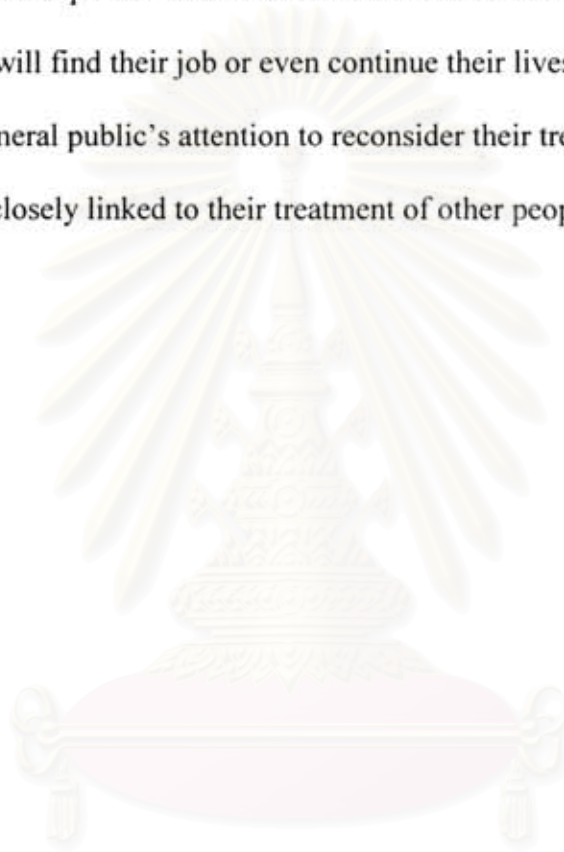
Although Rose of Sharon has just miscarried, encouraged by her mother, she gives milk from her breast to the dying old man:

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. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously. (578)

This distorted picture in which a pregnant woman who has had a miscarriage nurtures the dying man as if he were her newborn baby reflects a grotesque society in need of restoration. However, this image suggests the purest sense of humanity where a woman can give her milk made of her blood to a man who is not even her kin. In Peter Lisca's words, "Rose of Sharon's feeding of a stranger with the milk from her own breast is reenacted the primal act of human nourishment and the most intimate expression of human kinship" (59). Moreover, this final scene represents the victory and hope of the migrant people who can truly extend their humanity and kindness to help other people. In other words, even though these poor migrants are unable to free themselves from physical suffering, they are able to liberate their minds from selfishness, and thus uplift their minds. In a sense, Steinbeck suggests that love, humanity and understanding will enable people to solve all conflicts between them.

In conclusion, Steinbeck points out that ecological and social exploitation is derived from a human lack of environmental awareness. Since Steinbeck sees the environment as comprised of both humans and nature, the practice of land abuse is closely related to social domination. This fact leads to the writer's suggestion that ecological problems be solved together with social exploitation. Additionally, it is worth noting that the socialist movement as presented in the novel, such as the proletariats' class struggle to gain help and support, focuses solely on the attempt to

rectify the exploitative relationships among people in society. To Steinbeck, since this socialist view completely ignores the relationship between humans and nature, it cannot serve as a sustainable means of solving all the problems. As we can see, the novel neither ends with the working class's achievement of their union organizer's aspirations nor provides the reader with an answer to the question of whether the migrants will find their job or even continue their lives. In this sense, this novel calls for the general public's attention to reconsider their treatment to the natural world which is closely linked to their treatment of other people.



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CHAPTER IV

Familial Relationships and Ecological Responsibility in East of Eden

John Steinbeck's East of Eden, his later novel which is part fiction part autobiography, tells the story of two American families that lived in California from 1862 to 1918. During this period, a large number of European immigrants came to America to look for greater opportunity and a better life. Among those foreign migrants were Steinbeck's maternal grandparents who moved from Ireland to the American West in search of a new land and eventually settled family there. In the novel, Steinbeck portrays the lives of the grandparents' family in the Salinas Valley in parallel with those of another family from Connecticut that later became his family's neighbours in Salinas. Steinbeck, as the narrator of the novel, constructs his fictional characters both from his real ancestors and from his imagination.

Critics have studied this novel with different critical approaches. For example, analyzing the novel from a historical standpoint, Joseph Krutch's "John Steinbeck's Dramatic Tale of Three Generations" (1957) considers it to be a record of cultural development, particularly of the establishment of the traditional farmers and their communities in California. Lester Marks' Thematic Design in the Novels of John Steinbeck (1969) takes a different approach. Discussing the writer's use of Biblical allusions in the novel, Marks points out that Steinbeck reinterprets and adapts the story of Cain and Abel in a more realistic way as he allows his characters to have a chance to rectify their mistake. In addition, Lorelei Cederstrom's "Beyond the Boundaries of Sexism: The Archetypal Feminine versus Anima Women in Steinbeck's Novels" (2002) focuses on a feminist reading of the novel. Cederstrom

compares the female antagonist depicted as a witch or a devil to the Biblical Eve who causes disaster to man. Last, Stephen George's "The Philosophical Mind of John Steinbeck: Virtue Ethics and His Later Fiction" (2002) uses a thematic approach to analyze the influence of upbringing and heredity on the characters' personalities.

Analyzing this novel from an ecological standpoint, I will examine the characters' relationships with other people and their association with the natural environment. In this chapter, I will argue that familial relationship affects the characters' attitudes toward nature and their treatment of the natural world. In the novel, family functions as a fundamental institution that shapes individuals' interpersonal relations. The familial relations help foster an ability to establish a connection not only with other people but with the natural environment as well. Steinbeck illustrates that family conflicts obstruct individuals' relationships with other people and simultaneously causes their exploitative attitude toward nature. However, good family relationships nurture their compassionate understanding of their fellow humans and a sense of ecological responsibility.

Steinbeck first suggests that parents' lack of warmth and care destroys their child's capability to establish relationship with other people and the natural world. One prominent character who serves to illustrate this point is Adam Trask, a miserable person who suffers because of his authoritative father and his suicidal mother. During his childhood, Adam had to live with an indifferent stepmother and is tortured by his father's military training: "[h]e had always hated the discipline, as every normal animal does, but it was just and true and inevitable as measles, not to be denied or cursed, only to be hated" (27). That his father forces Adam to be a soldier and the separation from his mother lead to his melancholic personality and his rejection of his family. When Adam grows up, he does not belong to his home and is

unable to associate himself with any society. Although he has twice been released from military service, home is not a place he wants to return to, as Adam says: “I came out of the army like dragging myself muddy out of a swamp. I wandered for a long time before going home to a remembered place I did not love” (207). Adam’s dreadful experience of his home destroys his interpersonal relation with other people. Since Adam does not want to go back home, he lives a vagrant life for a very long period of time: “[h]e rolled a blanket and started slowly eastward, sometimes walking and sometimes with groups of men on the rods under slow-moving freight cars. At night he jungled up with wandering men in the camping places on the fringes of towns” (70). The “wandering men” whom Adam hangs out with are social outcasts who follow their lawless lives as an escape from their family problems and because of their inability to follow social conventions. The lack of love and understanding in Adam’s family hinders him from identifying himself with his home and from settling himself in any society.

Steinbeck further points out that Adam’s lack of good family relationship devastates his kinship with his birthplace. The appalling experience of his childhood makes Adam try to forget the memory of his family and his birthplace. Adam eventually decides to permanently leave his homeland in Connecticut to settle his family in California. However, Adam’s close contact with the land in California always reminds him of the feeling of bitterness toward his family and his father’s land in Connecticut:

In his mind a darkness was settling over his memory of Connecticut. Perhaps the hard flat light of the West was blotting out his birthplace. When he thought back to his father’s house, to the farm, the town, to his brother’s face, there was a blackness over all of it. And he shook off the memories. (191)

The picture of the sunset in his birthplace is blended with the memory of his father and brother covered by blackness. This picture reflects Adam's sadness about his family and birthplace. The combination of his father's house, the farm, the town, and his brother's face also suggests that the particular region is related to his family history. Adam's loss of his relationship with his family also breaks his bond with the natural surroundings in his birthplace. Moreover, Steinbeck compares Adam's isolation from his stepmother to his separation from his father's farmland: "Adam thought of his stepmother—as unloved as the farm, adequate, clean in her way, but no more wife than the farm was a home" (81). This comparison suggests that Adam's memory of his family is connected with the particular region. Since Adam's homeland is the site of his terrible experience of family, he tries to get rid of his memory of this place.

Furthermore, Adam's disastrous marriage seriously destroys his sense of duty towards both his children and his farmland in California. It annihilates his inspiration to take care of his children and his land. In the novel, his wife's betrayal and desertion make Adam totally neglect his role as a father: "[h]e was aware of the twins because he heard them cry and laugh, but he felt only a thin distaste for them. To Adam they were symbols of his loss" (306). Since Adam sees the twins as symbols of his failure, he neglects to nurture them with love and care. This behaviour suggests that the family conflict disrupts Adam's sense of responsibility for his children. In addition, Adam's failed marriage causes him to neglect his new land in California. When his wife leaves him, Adam feels terribly confused and leaves the land unimproved: "[o]n the Trask place Adam drew into himself. The unfinished Sanchez house lay open to wind and rain, and the new floorboards buckled and warped with

moisture. The laid-out vegetable gardens rioted with weeds” (306). This unpleasant condition of the land that results from Adam’s disappointment with his wife symbolizes his own turbulent mind. The parallel between his neglect of his duty as a father and his inattention of his role as the steward of the land suggests the association between familial relationship and ecological responsibility: problems in the broken family destroy one’s responsibility for the environment—both human and non-human.

Another character who illustrates the connection between familial relationship and ecological responsibility is Charles, Adam’s younger brother, whose indifferent father annihilates his interpersonal relations and his intimacy with nature. While Adam suffers from his father’s strictness, Charles is terribly lonely because of his father’s rejection. For example, when his father prefers Adam’s gift to his present, Charles feels jealous of his brother and thinks that his father loves Adam more than him. Charles grudgingly complains to Adam: “[h]e liked everything you brought him. He didn’t like me. He didn’t like anything I gave him. Remember the present I gave him, the pocketknife? I cut and sold a load of wood to get that knife” (80). That Charles cuts and sells wood to gain money to buy a present for his father suggests his attempt to gain his father’s love and his tendency to use nature as an easy source of profit. Moreover, Charles’ accumulated anger induces him to use violence as a way of taking revenge on his brother. As Adam puts it, Charles’ anger is like “the destructive machine that chopped down anything standing in its way”: “Rage came first and then a coldness, a possession; noncommittal eyes and a pleased smile and no voice at all, only a whisper. When that happened murder was on the way” (39). Rooted in the lack of his father’s love, Charles’ rage and jealousy gradually shape his violent and aggressive personality, impeding the development of his interpersonal skills and emotional quotient.

Furthermore, the inattentiveness of Charles' mother disrupts his process of socialization and stunts the development of his relationship with the natural world. His mother's failure to interact with him deprives him of an opportunity to experience maternal love and to establish a close relationship with her. Steinbeck demonstrates how his mother gives her child neither compassion nor kindness: "[s]he never offered any opinion or statement, and when a man was talking she gave a vague impression of listening while she went about doing the housework" (23). Charles' negative experience with his impassive mother makes him incapable of initiating relationships with any women. Adam's comment about Charles' failure to establish his own family suggests the effect of his mother's indifference: "he did not go about doing it by the usual process of meeting girls, taking them to dances, testing their virtues or otherwise, and finally slipping feebly into marriage" (57). This excerpt implies that since Charles has much difficulty interacting with women, it is almost impossible for him to develop fulfilling relationship with them.

Because Charles associates his parents with the farmland, he tends to project his anger and bitterness onto the land itself. When his father abandons him to work in Washington and his mother dies of asphyxiation, Charles, who becomes even more lonely and isolated, completely ignores the farm and the house:

[i]t was not a pretty farm near the house—never had been. There was litter about it, an unkemptness, a rundownness, a lack of plan; no flowers, and bits of paper and scraps of wood scattered about on the ground. . . . It was a grim farm and a grim house, unloved and unloving. (80)

Charles' indifference toward the land reflects the cold treatment that he has received from his parents. The lack of love thus becomes the only driving force in his life and his relationship with the land and other people. For example, in his father's and his

brother's long absence, Charles tends to use both himself and the land unlovingly: "Charles developed a restlessness that got him out at dawn. He worked the farm mightily because he was lonely. Coming in from his work, he gorged himself on fried food and went to bed and to sleep in the resulting torpor" (58). That Charles works "mightily" on the farm can be seen as his attempt to use the land as a way of taking revenge on his family members since the land is inseparably tied up with his family members. In a similar vein, when Adam and his wife permanently leave Charles to settle their family in California, Charles suffers a great deal from his brother's desertion and violently vents his anger on the natural surroundings: "[h]e raged at his farm, forced it, added to it, drilled and trimmed, and his boundaries extended. He took no rest, no recreation, and he became rich without pleasure and respected without friends" (163). In his abuse of the land, Charles imposes on it the penalty that he bitterly feels his brother deserves. Charles' brutal treatment of himself and the farm emphasizes that family conflicts destroy his self-love and his kinship with his family and nature.

Steinbeck further suggests that the characters who have hunger for love and attention tend to destroy other people and the natural environment. For instance, Cal, one of Adam's twin sons, always yearns for his father's love since everyone tends to be fond of Aron, his twin brother: "[f]rom his first memory Cal had craved warmth and affection, just as everyone does. If he had been an only child or if Aron had been a different kind of boy, Cal might have achieved his relationship normally and easily" (538). Moreover, Cal tends to hate those who favour his twin brother and seeks an opportunity to hurt them. Cal's punishment of those who appreciate his brother reflects his loss of interpersonal relations. His desire to triumph over his brother also suggests his unforgiving behaviour and his vindictive attempt to achieve mastery over

other people. It should also be noted that Cal applies his destructive behaviour of his treatment of the natural world. The scene when Cal damages the anthill shows his vicious attitude toward nature: “he would kick it to pieces and watch while the frantic ants took care of their disaster” (424).

In his insatiable desire for love and recognition, Cal can also do anything—including exploiting nature and other people—in order to gain attention and acceptance. For example, Cal’s yearning for his father’s loving approval stimulates him to set up in business and seek ways of gaining as much profit as possible. However, his way of doing business is exploitative and opportunistic. Advised by Will, a businessman in Salinas, Cal hoards dry beans and plans to plant the beans and sell them at much higher prices during the war: “[b]eans are up to three cents now. If we get into the war I wouldn’t be surprised if they went to ten cents. And you keep beans dry and they’ll be right there, waiting for a market. If you want to turn a profit, you plant beans” (530). His farming is merely a means of making money. Moreover, the way in which he takes advantage of other people and exploits the land during the war suggests his selfishness and environmental unawareness.

While Cal’s craving for love leads him to exploit nature, Aron’s lack of maternal love destroys his ability to accept the painful reality of his life. Aron’s desperate longing for the love of a mother who has abandoned him since his birth is evident in the scene when Aron begs his girlfriend, Abra, to play a role of mother to his child as Abra says: “‘[c]ome, my little son. Mother will hold you.’ She drew his head down, and without warning Aron began to cry and could not stop. He wept quietly, and Abra stroked his cheek and wiped the flowing tears away with the edge of her skirt” (516). Due to the lack of maternal love, Aron helplessly takes refuge in his imagination of his mother through the character of Abra. However, as Abra points

out. Aron loves her not for who she is, but as his surrogate mother: “[h]e doesn’t think about me. He’s made someone up, and it’s like he put my skin on her. I’m not like that—not like the made-up one. . . . Nothing but pure—never a bad thing” (599). His romanticization of Abra destroys his relationship with her while his illusion about the perfect picture of his mother renders him to be unable to face the repulsive reality about her. In the latter half of the novel, Aron is devastated by the discovery that his mother is a prostitute: “the face of the blond and beautiful boy, his eyes mad with shock. She heard his ugly words aimed not so much at her as at himself” (661). Aron’s rejection of his mother causes his psychological collapse and his decision to join the army, which eventually leads to his death.

Aron self-deceptively idealizes not only his mother but his environment as well. To him, the picture of his university is supposed to be similar to the Dore illustrations of Dante’s *Inferno*. Before he enters the university, he imagines that it is like the heavenly abode of saintlike people:

[h]is picture—never really inspected—had been of clean—eyed young men and immaculate girls, all in academic robes and converging on a white temple on the crown of a wooded hill in the evening. Their faces were shining and dedicated and their voices rose in chorus. (632)

In Aron’s imagination, the picture of his university is totally bright and clean. However, the real condition of the university is contrary to what he imagines. He ponders: “Leland Stanford University was not like that. A formal square of brown sandstone blocks set down in a hayfield; a church with an Italian mosaic front; classrooms of varnished pine; and the great world of struggle” (632). Since the natural atmosphere of the university does not fulfil his dream, Aron is greatly disenchanted. His disappointment makes him refuse to adjust himself to the new

environment: “[h]e was miserable. What he had expects to find at the university had been vague and beautiful. . . . He did not try to learn the life around him or to enter it. He found the natural noise and fuss and horseplay of undergraduates horrifying, after his dream” (632). Aron eventually wishes he could quit the university. Aron’s rejection of his mother and his university when their reality threatens to destroy his illusion suggests that his perception of nature and other people tends to be distorted by his self-centeredness.

Having argued that in East of Eden familial relationship significantly affects interpersonal relations and the human treatment of the natural world, I propose, in the rest of the chapter, that family kinship helps foster individuals’ capacity to develop interpersonal relations and ecological responsibility. Steinbeck’s novel suggests that the characters who have good family relationships tend to offer help and support to their fellow humans. These people, moreover, are portrayed as caretakers of the natural world. Steinbeck also demonstrates that the characters who lead pastoral lives with their family are closely tied to nature and highly responsible to their environment. Additionally, the characters who lack familial and ecological responsibility are able to gradually improve their sense of duty when they receive love and care from their fellows.

Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck’s grandfather, is one important character who well illustrates the idea that those with good familial relationships are more able to extend their love and care to both other people and the environment. After his migration with his wife from Ireland to America, Samuel established his family and his farm in the Salinas Valley: “it was a good firm-grounded family, permanent, and successfully planted in the Salinas Valley, not poorer than many and not richer than

many either. It was a well-balanced family Samuel was well pleased with the fruit of his loins” (56). Samuel’s act of “successfully plant[ing] his family” in the Salinas Valley suggests the connection of his family, the land and his farming.

Not only is Samuel the head of the family who takes good care of his wife and his children but he also cares for other people in his community. In the novel, Samuel is a blacksmith and carpenter who helps fix his neighbors’ agricultural tools without expecting anything in return: “[i]n the dusty business of ranching he seemed always immaculate. . . . He was forever inventing a new way of doing an old thing and doing it better and quicker, but he never in his whole life had any talent for making money” (14). That Samuel does not want to benefit from his neighbors points to his generosity and his privileging of friendship over money. More importantly, Samuel adapts the role of doctor who gently delivers not only his children but also those of his neighbours’:

Samuel Hamilton delivered all his own children and tied the cords neatly, spanked the bottoms and cleaned up the mess. . . . Samuel’s hands were so good and gentle that neighbors from twenty miles away would call on him to help with a birth. And he was equally good with mare, cow, or woman. (16)

His special skill in helping deliver children and tending women and animals points to his benevolence and suggests his role as a father to all living beings.

Samuel’s tender treatment of the land and animals is evident in a number of scenes. For example, Samuel maintains his special bond with the land even when it is desperately unproductive. He expresses his faith in its goodness: “I love that dust heap” and “I love it the way a bitch loves her runty pup. I love every flint, the plow-breaking outcroppings, the thin and barren topsoil, the waterless heart of her. Somewhere in my dust heap there’s a richness” (362). The passage reveals that

Samuel's kinship with the land is not based upon the profit that he can gain from it. His love of it continues even when it no longer serves as a source of material wealth. Moreover, Samuel has cordial relationship with and gently cares for his animals. He still loves his horse despite its weaknesses: "[h]e is selfish and quarrelsome and mean and disobedient. To this day I don't dare walk behind him because he will surely take a kick at me. When I feed him mash he tries to bite my hand. And I love him" (372). The explanation suggests that Samuel does not view his horse as a creature that exists to serve him. Rather, he sees his horse as his friend or his child who has a will of its own.

Steinbeck makes it very clear that Samuel's intimate ties with his neighbours and his homeland are not only central but also indispensable to his life. When Samuel has to leave his ranch to stay with his daughter in town, he suffers tremendously from his departure from home: "[h]e walked by the sad little garden and all around the house—not a new house any more. Even the last added lean-to bedrooms were old and weathered and the putty around the windowpanes had shrunk away from the glass" (351). The portrayal of his cherished environment from Steinbeck's point of view indicates that he projects his sadness and tiredness with life on to the place. Steinbeck further explains that Samuel is profoundly attached to the natural world of his homeland which he deems as his close relative:

[p]laces were very important to Samuel. The ranch was a relative, and when he left it he plunged a knife into a darling. . . . when he drove away from his old friends they knew they would not see him again, although he did not say it. He took to gazing at the mountains and the trees, even at faces, as though to memorize them for eternity. (358)

In his mind, there is no division between the human and the non-human. To be more specific, the natural environment in Salinas Valley essentially forms his very

existence. Once he is separated from it, his life and spirit soon atrophy. The severance of his ties with nature thus results in his death.

Apart from Samuel, Tom, one of his children, is one of the characters whose peaceful family life in the country helps foster his kinship with nature and other people. While all of Tom's siblings move to other places, Tom is the only person who remains on the ranch with his parents. Steinbeck portrays Tom's happy and carefree life in the idyllic setting of the pre-lapsarian world:

[h]e lived in a world shining and fresh and as uninspected as Eden on the sixth day. His mind plunged like a colt in a happy pasture, and when later the world put up fences he plunged against the wire, and when the final stockade surrounded him, he plunged right through it and out. (52)

The image of Tom's pastoral life in Eden on the sixth day suggests the harmonious co-existence of humans and the natural world. The comparison of Tom to a colt implies his wild spirit and breaks down the dichotomy between the human and the non-human. His rebellion against fences points to his resolve to destroy barriers that separate humans from nature and to dismantle the capitalist concept of land ownership.

With his deep love of the natural world, Tom is totally opposing to the exploitative treatment of other people and the natural world. Steinbeck indicates that Tom feels uncomfortable with trade because he does not want to take advantage of anybody. His involvement in business makes him feel that "somewhere he had lost track." and "he should take joy in the man-pleasures of contest" (338). Since Tom is opposing to competition, he has no inspiration to run business as he says: "I get no great triumph when I win and no tragedy when I lose" (338). That Tom does not wish to defeat other people parallels his kind treatment of the natural livings. For example,

he considers fishing as a leisure that brings him in close contact with nature. His goal is thus neither to catch fish nor to make money from the fish: “Tom had beautiful tackle and made his own flies. But he didn’t seem to care whether we caught trout or not. He needed not to triumph over animals” (343). This unconventional attitude toward fishing suggests his life’s emphasis on the non-exploitative and harmonious existence with other beings.

It is interesting to note that Tom often shares his love of the natural world with his nephew Steinbeck. Steinbeck, the narrator of the novel, vividly presents a scene when he takes a trip to the valley with his uncle:

[w]e started before the sun came up and drove in the rig straight toward Fremont’s Peak, and as we neared the mountains the stars would pale out and the light would rise to blacken the mountains. I can remember riding and pressing my ear and cheek against Tom’s coat. And I can remember that his arm would rest lightly over my shoulders and his hand pat my arm occasionally. (342)

Here Steinbeck’s pleasant and warm feelings toward the natural world are accompanied by his intimacy with his protective uncle as he is both enfolded in his uncle’s arm and embraced by Mother Nature. Moreover, his uncle Tom is one of those people who has taught him to appreciate the beauty of lives in nature. In his delineation of his childhood memory with his uncle in the Salinas Valley, he emphasizes his uncle’s quiet yet influential role in forming his relationship with nature:

I remember the sweeping lovely dance of high buzzards against the sky and Tom looking long up at them, but I can’t remember that he ever said anything about them. I remember holding the bite of a line while Tom drove pegs and braided a splice. . . . And I have no sound of his voice or

words in my ear; he is dark and silent and hugely warm in my memory.
(343)

The quality time Steinbeck spends with nature with his uncle enables him to learn about the lives of all beings in nature and their ecological balance. This experience with nature since his formative year and his close relationship with his nature-loving uncle encourage him to develop a special bond between himself and the natural world. This experience with his uncle not only remains “hugely warm in [his] memory” but also enhances his responsibility for nature. It is this kinship with nature that inspires him to record his memory of the Salinas Valley in East of Eden and pass his message on social and environmental awareness to the younger generation.

In addition to the characters of Samuel, Tom, and Steinbeck, Adam is another character that helps illustrate the idea that one’s good experience with other humans helps awaken one’s sense of interrelatedness. It should be pointed out that although Adam’s life has become atrophied owing to his unpleasant relationship with his parents and brother, his sense of responsibility for his land is re-ignited by his marriage and his hope of settling his family in California. It is Adam’s love and care for his wife that evokes the realization of his duty to take care of his new family and his new land in the Salinas Valley. As Adam tells Samuel, “I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far I’ve had no Eden, let alone been driven out” (206). This statement points to Adam’s loneliness and the absence of his kinship with the natural environment. That he refers to the Biblical significance of his name and his relationship to the Garden of Eden demonstrates his hope of establishing a place of his own where he and his wife can live peacefully in the perfect natural environment.

After long suffering from his wife's departure, Adam is also able to start his life anew thanks to the sympathetic help of his friend Samuel. The narrator describes Adam's return to his own land after the recovery from his mental illness:

He saw the wild-flowers in the heavy grass, and he saw the red cows against the hillsides, moving up the easy ascending paths and eating as they went. When he came to his own land Adam felt a quick pleasure so sharp that he began to examine it. . . . He was glad to be going home. He wanted to see how the twins had grown in the two days he had been gone—he wants to see the twins. (401)

The passage shows the awakening of his receptivity to the beauty of the natural world. The improvement of Adam's relationship with nature is immediately followed by his concern for his children. It is his friend's love and care that enables him to re-appreciate the vividness of nature and helps him realize his important duty to his children. At the end of the novel, Adam is able to fulfil his role as father by forgiving his son Cal who has caused his twin brother's death: "Adam looked up with sick weariness. His lips parted and failed and tried again. Then his lungs filled. He expelled the air and his lips combed the rushing sigh. His whispered word seemed to hang in the air: 'Timshel' His eyes closed and he slept" (728). Adam now attempts to show that he forgives his son's great sin even though he has suffered a stroke. His last word "Timshel" which means "chances" suggests that he gives his son an opportunity to learn from his fault and improve himself. It can be further said that Adam's love and understanding will help re-kindle Cal's treatment of nature and other people.

In conclusion, familial relationship plays a crucial role in affecting humans' interpersonal relations and their connection with nature. While parents' lack of love destroys their children's ability to establish a relationship with nature and other

people. good family relationships create a compassion for fellow humans and the natural surroundings. Samuel's attitude toward family relationships best describes Steinbeck's concept presented in this novel: "when a man finds good and bad in his children he is seeing only what he planted in them after they cleared the womb" (319). This statement expresses Steinbeck's idea that each individual's interaction with his or her environment—both human and non-human—is considerably influenced by upbringing and family relationship.



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CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Steinbeck presents his concept of environmental awareness in the three selected novels: To a God Unknown, The Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden. My analysis of To a God Unknown in the second chapter suggests his notion of ecological holism which means not only the inseparable union between humans and nature but also unity among different groups of people in terms of religion and gender. While the second chapter illustrates the ideal relationship with nature and other humans, the third chapter demonstrates the dreadful consequences of ecological ignorance. My reading of The Grapes of Wrath points out that the absence of ecological awareness causes both environmental and social exploitation. It also suggests that since the problems of environmental and social domination are closely related, it is necessary to solve them together. The fourth chapter examines the association between familial relationship and ecological responsibility in East of Eden, arguing that familial relationships have an influence on individuals' interpersonal relations and their treatment of nature. While family conflicts destroy children's ability to establish ties with other people and nature, family union creates compassion and duty to fellow humans and the natural surroundings.

The variety of Steinbeck's depictions of nature makes his novels interesting to study and analyze in the light of ecocriticism. For example, he presents the human inclination to interpret the Bible to support their superiority to the natural world. The image of nature as a destructive force points to the concept of naturalism whereas the intuitive perception of the land suggests a Romantic view of nature. Steinbeck also

integrates the science of ecology through his use of the images of the food chain and the life cycle. Moreover, the metaphor of the land as a dangerous woman who the protagonist has to humbly learn from can be extensively interpreted. Next, his image of the pastoral demonstrates the harmonious life in the natural world whereas he criticizes the capitalist system that considers nature as a source of profit and thus enhances social and ecological domination. It should be noted that Steinbeck suggests the relationship between humans and the environment not only in the three selected novels but in other literary works as well. I hope this thesis will help invite other critics to further examine his other works—fiction and non-fiction—from an ecocritical approach.

As a Thai reader, I think that the issues of environmental and social exploitation that Steinbeck raises in his novels are relevant to social and ecological problems in Thailand. As Malithat Promathatavedi notes, “[o]ne factor that makes John Steinbeck a very popular author with Thai readers is that many of his themes are universal and some can be related to Thai culture and situations” (140). To be specific, the expansion of capitalism presented in Steinbeck’s novels reflects the modern situation in the Thai social context. For instance, the Oklahoma migrants in California can be seen as the Isarn workers in Bangkok. Similar to the Okies, the migrant workers from the North East of Thailand have to abandon their agricultural life because of natural disasters and the capitalist system. They look for jobs in the city and suffer from various forms of social exploitation. The similar problems shared by the Oklahoma migrants and the poor workers in the city of Bangkok invite us to consider Steinbeck’s proposed solutions for these problems in Thailand. Since the majority of Thai people depend upon agriculture as the major source of living, land preservation, the traditional agrarian community and self-sufficient agriculture

suggested in Steinbeck's novels might serve as possible solutions for Thai farmers. His suggestion of sustainable agriculture which corresponds with that of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand should be seriously considered by Thai people in order to successfully solve the environmental and social problems.

The relevance of Steinbeck's novels to Thai society and my ecological analysis of these literary works have prompted me to interview government officers in Thailand's Agricultural Research Center about Thai farmers' environmental awareness. In their close contact with the farmers, the officers found that ecological responsibility is sometimes beyond the farmers' competence. Due to their economic deficiency, it is necessary for them to primarily focus on their everyday survival rather than on the significance of land conservation. For example, they plant the same crop every year during the rainy season and leave the land fallow in summer to find jobs in the city. As the officers explain, since drought during summer in certain parts of Thailand obstructs all agricultural activities, multiple cropping that could help revitalize the fertility of the land is impossible during this season. Although the farmers realize that monocropping reduces the fertility of the land, they have no money to hire workers to rotate the land. The officers further reveal that the low quality of the soil in some places restricts the types of crop that the farmers can grow. In certain regions, only sugarcane or cassava can be planted because they can still be produced in very poor soil. In some cases, the farmers have no market to sell other kinds of produce, so they have to raise the same crop every year. The government officers' suggestion of land preservation is therefore impossible to most farmers and practical to only a few. From this explanation, it can be seen that such circumstances induce destitute farmers to ignore the significance of land improvement.

According to the officers, it seems very difficult for the farmers to be aware of the importance of land conservation since environmental responsibility is far from their everyday struggle. However, the complicated conditions of the farmers suggest that the solutions to social and environmental problems include not only environmental awareness but the improvement of their knowledge and other agricultural skills. In other words, Steinbeck's suggestion about ecological responsibility truly enables people to live harmoniously with nature only when it is enhanced by agricultural education. For instance, the farmers need to learn about crops that are suitable to cultivate in each season and advanced agricultural tools that can help improve their farming. Moreover, government officers should provide them with useful information in order to help them manage their farms in a sustainable way. Then, the awakening of both ecological awareness and the development of farming ability will help protect the farmers from poverty and the desertion of their homeland.

My discussion of the real condition of the Thai farmers may make Steinbeck look like an idealist who perceives social and environmental problems from his optimistic yet rather limited point of view. It is usually believed that those who work in the literary field tend to be thinkers rather than practitioners. Nevertheless, Steinbeck's ecological insight that focuses on the centrality of social and environmental awareness suggests his attempt to get in touch with reality and his responsibility for both society and for the environment. Although Steinbeck's solutions might not be easy to follow in the capitalist world and require much time before one can appreciate their advantages, they can be regarded as some of the ways that can help solve social and ecological crises. Additionally, since Steinbeck's environmental insight concentrates on each individual's realization, I believe that

personal efforts will gradually restore the social and environmental condition. As Gerald Gardner points out, the individual role is essential for the improvement and protection of the world: “[w]e do not conclude that there is little individuals can do to protect the environment, or that it is a waste of time to try to change individual behavior. Many proenvironmental individual behaviors do significantly lessen pollution and conserve energy” (7).

It is worth noting that Steinbeck not only criticizes the root cause of the troubles but also offers sustainable solutions to both social and environmental problems. In writing this research at a time when people around the world are suffering a great deal from various destructive natural disasters and severe social conflicts, I hope to call readers’ attention to the urgent need to solve the problems and to share with them what I think is the hopefulness of Steinbeck’s ecological vision. Since most disasters arise from human beings’ mistreatment of nature and other people, it is human responsibility for solving environmental and social problems.



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