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TeMAAT, Agatha, 1922-
JOHN STEINBECK: ON THE NATURE OF THE
CREATIVE PROCESS IN THE EARLY YEARS.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln,
Ph.D., 1975
Literature, modern

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PREVIEW

John Steinbeck: On the Nature
Of the Creative Process In the Early Years

by

Agatha TeMaat

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

Under the Supervision of Professor James L. Roberts

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1975

TITLE

John Steinbeck: On the Nature Of the Creative Process

In the Early Years

BY

Agatha TeMaat

APPROVED

DATE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The dependence of this dissertation on published sources will be evident in the text. I owe my gratitude to many who have helped me with this dissertation. To Professor James L. Roberts, who advised me, a special gratitude is due. To Professor Bernice Slote, Professor Mordecai Marcus, and Professor Robert Narveson who read the dissertation and offered valuable suggestions. To the directors, curators, and aids at the following libraries who cheerfully found the materials I sought and who gave permission to quote from the materials in the Steinbeck Collections: The American Academy of Arts and Letters and The National Institute of Arts and Letters, The Bancroft Library, The Clifton Waller Barrett Library, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and their Collection of American Literature, California State Library, Cornell University Library, The Houghton Library, The Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, The Library of Congress, The Lilly Library, Mills College Library, New York Public Library, Norlin Library, The Pierpont Morgan Library, University of Southern California Library, The Salinas Library, The Stanford University Libraries, The Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, and the University of Nebraska: Love and Undergraduate Libraries. To the University of Nebraska for the Maude Hammond Fling Travel Fellowship which enabled me to visit the libraries. To Professor A. Grove Day, Professor Emeritus at the University of Hawaii, who gave me

invaluable information about John Steinbeck's early years. To Nancy Lynn Napiorski who loaned me her copy of The Moon Is Down with the autographed inscription reading, "John Steinbeck, the poor man's Homer." To Marshall A. Best from The Viking Press who first informed me of the existence of the Journal for The Grapes of Wrath. To Elizabeth Otis who read the dissertation and whose encouragement and kind words mean so much to me. To Pascal Covici, Jr., for permission to quote from his father's letters to John Steinbeck and for his words of encouragement. To Deborah Covington for permission to quote from her father's (Ben Abramson) letters. To each member of my family--who always believed in me and encouraged me--who first showed me the Steinbeck country, who traveled Highway 66 with me, who showed me the Sea of Cortez, and who became Steinbeck experts. To the Sisters of Mercy who first enabled me to undertake graduate study. To my friend, Eileen Nelson, who not only read all of Steinbeck's work but who read and listened critically to my work and encouraged me. To Dorothy Atkins for that unique encouragement only one graduate student can give to another. To the Steinbeck Estate for permission to quote from the letters, journals, and manuscripts which enriched my work and my life.

To the memory of John Ernst Steinbeck: 1902-1968.

Agatha TeMaat

March 10, 1975

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Notes Used Within the Text for Letters and Manuscripts

Approximately one thousand letters as well as a number of journals and many of the manuscripts of John Steinbeck were researched at the libraries listed on pages vi and vii of this text in preparation for the writing of this dissertation. The letters, journals, and manuscripts cover a span of the author's lifetime from 1921 to 1966; however, the focus of this present work relates to the creative process as illuminated by the letters written in the early years, primarily from 1921 through 1936.

In the first note to each document I have given the present location of the autograph or specified the transcript or other source followed. As for explanatory notes I have made an effort to credit them to their propounders. Personal names are identified at their first appearance and can then be followed by means of the Index. Many well-known persons, many familiar books and certain quotations are identified, because Steinbeck's reading, or "learning," is a matter of significant interest and importance. Some of his critical ideas are dealt with, as are some of his scientific and philosophical and moral views of man in relation to his universe--because these ideas and views are pertinent to a study of John Steinbeck's creative process in these early years of his writing.

Index of Names
Appearing Frequently in the Letters: 1921-1936

BA	Ben Abramson
GA	George Albee
BB	Robert "Bob" Ballou
PC	Pascal Covici
C-F	Covici-Friede, Inc.
JJ	Joseph Henry Jackson
HM	Harry Thornton Moore
RL	Ritchie Lovejoy
WN	Wilbur Needham
EO	Elizabeth Otis
LCP	Lawrence Clark Powell
LP	Louis Paul
ER	Ed Ricketts
JS	John Steinbeck
AT	Agatha TeMaat
AAAL:NYC	American Academy of Arts and Letters The National Institute of Arts and Letters New York City
BL:UC	The Bancroft Library The University of California at Berkeley
BL:UVa	The Clifton Waller Barrett Library University of Virginia Library
BL:YU	The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library Yale University

CSL:S	California State Library Sacramento
CUL:CU	Cornell University Library Cornell University
H:HU	The Houghton Library, The Harvard College Library Harvard University
HRC:UT	The Humanities Research Center University of Texas at Austin
LL:IU	The Lilly Library Indiana University
LC:WDC	The Library of Congress--Manuscript Division Washington, D.C.
MCL:MC	Mills College Library Mills College
NYPL:NYC	New York City Public Library Miscellaneous Papers; Whitford Kane Papers; Manuscripts & Archives Division; Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations New York City
NL:UC	Norlin Library University of Colorado
PML:NYC	The Pierpont Morgan Library New York City
SPL:S	The Salinas Public Library Salinas, California
SL:SU	Stanford University Libraries Stanford University
USCL:USC	University of Southern California Library University of Southern California
UPa:UPa	The Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library University of Pennsylvania

Abbreviated Names and Titles

In the footnotes and generally elsewhere the following abbreviations of names and titles are used:

A	Autograph
T	Typed
S	Signed
I	Initialed
Ms	Manuscript
Mss	Manuscript
L	Letter
N	Note
D	Document
C	Card
PC	Post Card
cc	Carbon Copy
p	Page
pp	Pages
nd	No Date
[]	No Date listed but the information between the brackets is supplied from some source other than the manuscript itself.

The Texts

In the texts of all the letters the spelling, the capitalization,

and punctuation of the originals are reproduced as exactly as possible. Misspellings and typographical errors are not corrected but simply are underlined.

Dates

The datelines have been made uniform in style, except that when Steinbeck wrote the wrong day or date, or omitted it, the correct one or the one judged to be correct from the dates stamped on them by PC or some other recipient's markings, or from the context of the letter in relation to another letter which is dated or from the post mark on the envelope--has been supplied in brackets [].

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I am concerned with the nature of the creative process in the writing of John Steinbeck in his early years, particularly from 1921 through 1936. The outline of Steinbeck's theory and practice presented here is based on a reading and interpretation of all of Steinbeck's available work written during these first fifteen years of his life as a writer, including his journals and manuscripts, his fiction and his letters. Although the scope of the dissertation is limited to the early works, the primary material researched is voluminous, and ranges in date from 1921 through 1968, nearly a half century during which Steinbeck experimented in a variety of forms and theories of fiction, especially as his philosophical and scientific concepts about man (in his varying relationships with the universe) developed from the writer's early holistic view through the period when he was influenced by a non-teleological approach as well as by the phalanx argument about "unit-man" which Steinbeck shaped at this time, to a reconciliation in his mind of a combination

of a teleological and non-teleological explanation of man in the human condition.

Steinbeck was an interesting if not imposing figure in American Letters, spanning the late twenties, the Great Depression of the thirties, the World War II decade, the post-war fifties, and the first half of the impressionable sixties filled with its technological advances and ecological concerns, and finally contributing definitively to the literary achievements of twentieth-century American writers. During this lengthy period, Steinbeck shifted his views to some degree, particularly when the results from his experimentation in form called for a change. He never adopted and followed exclusively one set pattern for his fiction; yet, he remained remarkably stable in his theoretical views despite the experimentation in form. A chronological survey of his fictional concepts reveals a gradual broadening and more comprehensive realization of life's complexity and the vastness in scope of its fictional images, but it also recognizes, especially in his early works, its experimental nature. Each work, he said, was "written¹ . . . as an exercise, as practice for the one to come."

This present study is a developmental approach toward a biography of the nature of the creative process in the works of John Steinbeck in his earliest writings from 1921 to 1936. Because the nature of this work requires that intensive attention be focused on the individual work of art in relation to the variety

of primary source materials, i.e., letters, journals, and manuscripts, the work becomes not only a biography of the creative process, but also, in a parallel approach, a literary biography of the writer as well.

The primary materials used as sources include approximately one thousand letters, most of them written by John Steinbeck. These letters illuminate the genesis of an idea and trace its development from the incubation and preparatory stages of the writing to its final draft. Often the letters reveal the relationship between experiences of the writer and the fictional construct by which he has transmuted experience into the narrative form. Most of them are unpublished. I have read them in various archives. Numerous letters by Pascal Covici as John Steinbeck's editor, ranging over a twenty-five-year period from 1938 to 1964 and containing valuable information, insight, and dates, are located at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas (12 August 1938, telegram; 13 October 1964, hospital). A noteworthy collection of letters by Ben Abramson to John Steinbeck, written as shown by the dates between 1935 and 1941 and containing informative matter concerning Steinbeck's methods and techniques relating to the act of writing, are located at Beinecke Library at Yale University while holographs of much of this correspondence reside in the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. Along with the letters are many manuscripts and a number

of journals which are discussed fully within the text of this dissertation.

The primary works to be considered in relation to the development of the writer's creative process as it is delineated in these works and in his writings concerning these works include the following: The Stanford stories--"Adventures in Arcademy: A Journey into the Ridiculous" and "Fingers of Cloud: A Satire on College Protervity"; The Stanford poem--"Atropos: Study of a Very Feminine Obituary Editor"; The first published short story--"The Gifts of Ihan--A Charming Fantasy"; The early novels--Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown, Tortilla Flat, and In Dubious Battle; The short stories--"The Chrysanthemums," "The Gift," "The Great Mountains," "The Murder," "The Raid," "The Snake," and "The White Quail"; The essay--"Argument of Phalanx."

In 1969, with the posthumous publication of Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters (written in 1951 from January to November in the same "double-entry book" which contained the manuscript of the novel), Steinbeck's method of "warming up his pencil" (as he called it) was revealed for his readers, both the critical and the popular. This "sharpening of the pencil" (as Pascal Covici, throughout the many years of editor-author relationship, called the "warm-ups") revealed significant information not only about Steinbeck's view of his artistic work but also

(and perhaps to some scholars more significantly) about the writer's concepts and perceptions of the cosmos to which he leads his reader in this macrocosmic view of the Salinas Valley Edenic micro-²cosm. The publisher's notes in Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters succinctly state that "the letters were also full of serious thinking about this novel, his longest and most ambitious; about novel-writing in general; and about some of Steinbeck's deepest convictions. Not a formal act of literary creation for its own sake, this document casts a flood of light on the author's mind and on the nature of the creative process."³ The publication of this journal, which Steinbeck kept during the writing of East of Eden, reveals much about the creative process of one of the world's most widely read authors, about his method of setting down in logical order the argument and justification of his theme, about the method of discipline employed in his daily work, about the relationship between author and publisher, and, also, about the author's concern for his reader.

This publication of Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters and the publication one year previously of The Log From the Sea of Cortez, with the addition of the section "About Ed Ricketts," as well as the publication in 1941 of Sea of Cortez, reveal further significant insights into the effect of certain and specific relationships at work in the shaping of this writer. Further, just as these publications provide Steinbeck criticism

with a clear statement of Steinbeck's world view and of his philosophical view of man, they also provide the author with a platform other than the fictional construct from which he can promulgate his philosophical and scientific beliefs about man in the cosmos.

The impact of these relationships in the formation of Steinbeck's view of cosmic unity, for example, is easily deducible to the serious reader of Steinbeck who knows about the Steinbeck-Ricketts friendship, the fascinating $\sqrt{-(R+S)}$ ² ⁴. Much has been written about this relationship and its influence on the ⁵ writer. Some has been written about the close relationship between Steinbeck as the creative instinct and Pascal Covici as his mentor-publisher. Yet, not much has been said about the early relationships which influenced and nurtured the artist in his search for the meaning and the understanding of man and his universe. The mature Steinbeck in his daily struggle with the novel in progress is observable in Journal of a Novel: The Last of Eden Letters; the scientific-philosophical Steinbeck is observable in Sea of Cortez, and "About Ed Ricketts." However, because no in-depth study of the nature of the creative process of Steinbeck in his formative years has been made, the young artist is not observable to the reader-critic. Hence the necessity of this examination.

The reader of these later works of Steinbeck will assume that perhaps the young writer practiced similar techniques in the writ-

ing of his early stories; and the assumption will be readily provable upon research in the letters and manuscripts of the early years. For among these letters and manuscripts are found journals and ledgers which reveal as much about Steinbeck's practice of writing and his theory about writing as they illuminate his art. For example, in his later writing, John Steinbeck kept a "work diary" while he was writing the first draft of The⁶ Grapes of Wrath from June through October of 1938. This journal and the letters written while this work was in progress reveal his concepts and convictions about the dignity of man, his concern about the deplorable social conditions over which he has the first-hand information of a witness, and, at the same time, they reflect the symphonic background on which Steinbeck structured both the chapters which move the action forward as well as the general chapters which describe and define the socio-economic-historical impetus to the novel. Further, the journal maps the actual working days and hours and fictional theories and techniques of a novel in progress.

There are earlier journals and letters which can be found with the early manuscripts of John Steinbeck and if they are read in chronological order they reveal significant delineation of theories and practices and relationships which shaped the writer, his concept of art, and his art. In these documents, the forthrightness of the author's statements about the art of writing

may be due, on the one hand, to his youth, and on the other hand, to the fact that he is writing either to friends or critics who know him personally. These various journals, letters, and manuscripts serve readily as a guide to a study and a history of the nature of Steinbeck's creative process; therefore, this study will focus on these varying aspects of the works in progress in the early years and will give an overview of the relationships between theory as outlined in the journal and letters and practice as executed in the manuscripts, between the false starts and the first stages of a first draft to the final corrected galley proofs, and between the correspondent and the recipient of the correspondence.

In other words, John Steinbeck's letters and journals functioned both as "warm-up" exercises and working notes for a work in progress⁷ and also as a portrayal of the writer as artist⁸ and as humanist.⁹ He did discuss and write about some works in the incubation, the preparation, and the writing stages; however, this method was not fixed. For example, while writing The Grapes of Wrath, he found the book satisfying "so far but I can't tell yet whether it gets over since no one is seeing it."¹⁰ One of his friends from the Stanford days, Webster (Toby) Street, reports that John Steinbeck "would not discuss at all one of his books with me once it was written."¹¹ This was not a rigid rule with Steinbeck for on occasion he would discuss a work in various

stages of writing; and, surprising as it may seem, sometimes he¹²
 even welcomed a reading of his manuscript by a friend. However,
 once a story was told, he had "a strong reluctance toward going¹³
 back into finished story."

The purpose and intent of this history is to understand intellectually the nature of the creative process of Steinbeck as a creative writer in his fiction and letters and journals from 1921 up to and including the writing of In Dubious Battle, which was published in January of 1936. Further, this history is an attempt to see the relationships between the parts in the whole corpus of fiction written during these early years; to observe the imaginative act of eye and mind and heart; and finally, by such an examination, to separate and to observe imaginatively, the principal objects and major themes and experimentations in form as they grew in Steinbeck's mind during the creative process until the culmination in the final act of imagination of the author's vision as it appeared in the printed text.

The majority of Steinbeck's critics have focused on the art of the individual work as an entity separate from the process¹⁴ of creation; therefore, the justification and validation of a study which combines the examination of the development of the artist and of his art. Much has been written on Steinbeck's major works, particularly of his two masterpieces, Of Mice and Men and The Grapes of Wrath; therefore, the logic of a chronological survey

of the early works immediately preceding these significant contributions to American Literature, particularly since the author frequently tested his literary theories and hypotheses as well as discussed his fictional practices in the letters and journals of this early period. Because the writer's culture, imagination, and experience play a significant role in the development of his creative process, it is reasonable to consider in chronology the writings which preceded the artist's works which brought him fame, success, and wealth. This latter trio, in part at least, brought about a change in the artist's residence as well as in his life style: the little house in Pacific Grove was changed for a ranch house with a swimming pool in the mountains overlooking the beautiful Santa Clara Valley; the dream of travel became a reality and John Steinbeck traveled to Mexico, to the East, to Europe. However, the privacy he loved was lost in the fanfare following the publication of The Grapes of Wrath. Steinbeck recognized the danger to his creativity. "Whereas a few years ago I could not sell my work," he wrote in his Grapes of Wrath Journal, "now it is so in demand that anything with my name on it would be snapped up. And that is the worst thing of all."

NOTES: Introduction

1

John Steinbeck, Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters (New York: Bantam, 1970), 8.

2

"Macrocosmic thinking is tragic. The truly wise man will leave it and dwell in the microcosm of the moment." This statement is taken from a photostatic copy of a ledger in which John Steinbeck started a Journal in 1943. H. Gossage says that John Steinbeck was "about to throw the book out when he was moving to a new apt in 1963 & I graciously volunteered to take it off his hands if he'd autograph it, which he did . . . I gave this page to Carl Ally--a Steinbeck scholar (M.A., Michigan) and he sent me this photostat." The photostatic copy is at Bancroft Library at the University of California (hereafter cited as BL:UC) and is dated 13 October 1964. Gift of Warren P. Howell, June 1971. Throughout his career as a writer, Steinbeck celebrated the greatness of man in his quest for meaning in life and he observed sympathetically the perfectibility of man as a social animal who sometimes blundered and failed. The writer's artistic world-view was informed by a dualistic philosophy of life: he viewed the cosmos as an integrated whole with interdependent parts and he drew many of his principles of this holistic, inductive thinking from the ideas of William Emerson Ritter's doctrine of organismal conception which Steinbeck learned from a summer course he took at the Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove in 1923. Organismic biology is teleological (i.e., in philosophy, a teleology supposes that things exist for some purpose) and is goal-directed and seems to be demonstrated in many of the themes of Steinbeck's best fiction. In the thirties, Steinbeck often discussed his philosophical and scientific views with his marine biologist friend, Edward F. Ricketts whose knowledge, learning, and intelligence he respected greatly. At this time Steinbeck's philosophy was teleologically oriented whereas Ed Ricketts viewed non-teleological thinking as the means by which man can come to an understanding acceptance of the whole. In other words, Ricketts seems to view non-teleological thinking as "an open approach to life by the man who looks at events and accepts them as such without reservation or qualification, and in so doing perceives the whole picture by becoming an identifiable part of that picture." Although there are some characters in Steinbeck's fiction who live by Ricketts' principle of understanding acceptance of "is" thinking, for the most part Steinbeck's characters are men of action rather than idealists of passive acceptance. However, these early works

1