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Bakalářská práce

John Steinbeck and His Attachment to the  
Landscape of California

John Steinbeck a jeho vztah ke krajině  
Kalifornie

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## Abstract

In the perspective of ecocritical reading, the work will deal with the minor literary forms of the American prose writer John Steinbeck (Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, The Wayward Bus) and will attempt to define the environment of Steinbeck's prose, his perceptions of the environment and landscape descriptions, including the description of the characters facing the natural conditions within the landscape of Steinbeck's literary California. In the introductory part the thesis will theoretically focus on the issue of ecocriticism as a contemporary literary approach to the environment and the landscape of analyzed novels. At the core of the work will be the application of ecocritical theoretical bases for John Steinbeck's work, primarily on his perception of space, nature and landscape. Part of the work will be a chapter dealing with Steinbeck's biography and his relationship with the nature and landscape of the West Coast of the United States.

## Anotace

Práce se bude v perspektivě ekokritického čtení zabývat drobnějšími literárními útvary amerického prozaika Johna Steinbecka (Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, The Wayward Bus) a pokusí se o definici prostředí Steinbeckovy prózy, jeho vnímání prostředí a popisu krajiny včetně charakteristiky postav, které přírodním podmínkám čelí a krajinu Steinbeckovy literární Kalifornie obývají. V úvodní části se práce teoreticky zaměří na problematiku ekokritiky jako současného literárního přístupu k prostředí a krajině románů. Jádrem práce bude aplikace ekokritických teoretických východisek na tvorbu Johna Steinbecka, především na jeho vnímání prostoru, přírody a krajiny. Součástí práce bude kapitola zpracovávající Steinbeckovu biografii a jeho spjatost a přírodou a krajinou západního pobřeží USA.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

I would like to be able not only to characterize through Steinbeck`s landscape depiction from the point of view of ecological criticism applied in literature, but also I would like to focus thoroughly on his ability of reflecting sensitive perception of the world in general, because in Steinbeck`s works there are literally ecological aspects of landscape depiction closely connected to a deep analysis of a social background and environment of his novel characters.

Steinbeck`s noteworthy perception of the natural environment is enabled through the same empathy and humanity that he is able to prove while giving a penetrating point of view on the difficulties and delights of the people inhabiting the landscape and fulfilling their destinies. Through his characters John Steinbeck is actually creating ecological research of the then agricultural landscape as he writes about seaside and the ocean as the dominating element of the earth through different characters.

It is good to realize that the landscapes of the novel`s plots are usually sceneries of written literary characters. Also in need of understanding we should consider shapes of the landscapes as a working of humans. That is why the connection of the ecocriticism and human phenomenon is determining for the author.

## 2 The OUTSET of ENVIRONMENTAL LITERARY RESEARCH

The history of ecocriticism has quite unclear origins. In 1970s we confirm the existence of studies which engaged in sociology, history, religion or philosophy, however independent treatises dealing with natural environment did not appear. According to Cheryl Glotfelty we should be able to recognize certain individual endeavor of some literary and culture experts, trying to establish the way of literature criticism including ecologically skills in 1970s, nevertheless they were never integrated to a single specified group and their attempts were not considered as the act of a critical school of any kind. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

Despite these tough beginnings eco critics slowly started to ring a bell of the literary province. It started to participate in a program of annual literary conferences. Many of them actually included special sessions of the environmental writing and literature, especially in the session of Modern language association lined up by Harold Fromm from the 1991, called 'Ecocriticism: 'The greening of literary studies'. In a short time in 1992 the 'Association for the study of Literature and Environment (ASLE)' was established. The object of ASLE was to 'Support the idea and information exchange regarding the literature dealing with the relationship between the nature and the human-kind.' Also they managed to countenance traditional and innovative scientific approach to the environmental literature and interdisciplinary study and a new natural writing containing natural constituents. In 1993 ASLE started to publish its own magazine called 'Interdisciplinary Studies in literature and environment (ISLE)'. ISLE established the way the ecocritical studies set out until nowadays. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

According to Buell, ISLE still publishes essays about the nature narration, pastoral theory and Wordsworth's poverty. However, the last edition containing this topic was an independent section about Henry David Thoreau and actually it was the very first one. (In spring 1993). In latest editions we could find articles about autobiographical immigration, British and American film, Australian creations, revisionist interpretation of animal meetings during medieval life of St. Francis or Latin American poverty of environmental justice. (Buell, 2005)

The Previous paragraph leads to a connection with Garrard's contemplation. According to Garrard, many of early ecocritical works could be described for their

extraordinary concern for describing wild nature, natural elements or Romantic poetry in contradistinction to the last few years when the ASLE changed its interest range into more universal cultural ecocriticism engaging in film, art, television, architecture, popular scientific writing and other cultural artifacts such as shopping malls, zoos or amusement parks. In other words, it is a wide spectrum of cultural products and processes in which nature and culture seek to find a common compromise that leads to coexistence, on which ecocriticism focused nowadays. (Garrard, 2004)

### 3 The GENESIS of ECOCRITICISM

Origins of Ecocriticism return us back to 1960s when the hippies were born in America, and the wave of environmentalism swept across the United States. Rachel Carson, with her book *Silent Spring* (1962), was a major contributor to the popularity of environmental literature during the beginning of 1960s. She depicted the harmony between mankind and mother nature spread through by natural beauty that took place in time which is violated by ecological disaster. Almost all living died of a variety of diseases including cattle, sheeps and birds. *Silent Spring* symbolizes and links not only the loss of bird singing that accompanies the spring morning but also paraphrases the devastating ecological disaster, destroying everything alive. Carson's way of creating her more or less scientific matter with using apocalyptic depiction, rhetorical strategies and literary insinuations can be assimilated into cultural or literal analysis. And this analysis represents what we are going to call ecocriticism one day. (Garrard, 2004)

However, it was not only Rachel Carson with her '*Silent Spring*' who influenced the very origins of the ecocriticism. '*Nature in American Literature*' by Norman Foerster was published already in 1923, almost 40 years before Carson's '*Silent Spring*'. '*The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture*' was written by Leo Marx in 1964. These two mainly symbolize American treatises whereas Raymond Williams'es '*The country and the city*' constituted the base of British studies in 1973 and it was considered a masterwork of ecocriticism when the term was established in 1978. Williams, with his book, anticipated the arrival of '*Romantic Ecology*' by Jonathan Bate which was published in 1991. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* represents another important work of American ecocritical studies. (Buell, 2005)

According to Glen A. Love we observe that Meeker's work proposed the very first actual new ecocritically perspective writing. Love claims that literature deserves to be conscientiously and genuinely scrutinized once it is considered an important attribute of the human kind, as well as he finds important to determine its importance for affluence and survival of human kind. It is also our task to find out how deep can we go into the problematics of coexistence of humans and other species or the Earth itself through literature. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

Lawrence Buell presents us two waves of ecocriticism. He asserts that for the first wave of ecocriticism the 'environment' was actually 'natural environment'. He quotes ideas of Howarth and Elder who, said in a very simplified way, claimed that the ecocriticism should define concept of the culture in a natural background and their influence of each other. (Buell, 2005)

According to Buell the second wave of ecocriticism inclines to cast doubt upon ecological conception of environment and environmentalism themselves. He quotes Bennet who says that literature and environmental studies need to elaborate 'social ecocriticism', which takes natural and urban or degraded landscapes as equal. (Buell, 2005)

Buell asserts that ecocriticism is increasingly pervading across the academic sphere, ranging from college studies in large study literature to training compositional courses. Also it seems to be open wide to groups of environmental activists and narrators as well as non-academic educators of environmental doctrine. (Buell, 2005)

## 4 ECOCRITICISM

The term 'Ecocriticism' was presented into the literary community by an essay of William Rueckert: 'Literature and ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' in 1978. For Rueckert ecocriticism represented the application of ecological concepts and ecology into the study of literature. He claimed that in the biggest misdemeanor of the human being is his humane tendency to humanize, conquer, exploit, violate or domesticate every single nature component. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

If we want to explore the purpose of Ecocriticism we have to distinguish that his main aim is to study the relationship between physical environment and literature and that if we plan to learn about literature we need to assess it from terrestrial point of view. Glotfelty claims that ecocriticism makes itself an object of connection between culture and nature, especially cultural language artifacts and literature. Ecocriticism is defined by its differential from other critical attitudes. In general, literary theory investigates relationships between narrators, their writing and the world itself. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

Glotfelty also sums up the sum of questions most often asked by ecocritical theorists. Such as: "What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? How is nature represented in this sonnet? How is science itself open to literary analysis?..." Their goal is to find satisfactory answers to these questions. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

Lawrence Buell, professor of Harvard University, may be considered one of the biggest promoters of the ecocriticism ideas. Many of ecocritics obey with his four criteria about the study of texts. He constructed them in his early ecocritics line called: *„The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995):*

*„1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.*

*2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.*

*3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.*

4. *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.*<sup>1</sup>

There is one certain worry that most of the ecocritical works share. They state disconcertedly that we are slowly colliding with environmental limits and we are getting close to emptying of the reserves. Simply said, we stand on the threshold of a break, when all the actions of mankind will disrupt the fundamental systems of our planet that are necessary for life. We are facing the outbreak of the ecological crisis. (Garrard, 2005)

Timothy Clark claims that a wide archive is being designed by ecocritical experts which pursue many different nature conceptions and their relationship with broad cultures of the world as well as their impact on the history. (Clark, 2011) It follows that ecocriticism is still at a stage of gradual development. According to Scott Slovic who worked as a former president of ASLE, ecocriticism lacks theoretical devise or a central prominent doctrine, however it is often reconstructed by unflagging work of throngs of literal savants across the world. That means that ecocriticism is closely connected to an object more than to the theoretical admittances while using a few methods of research. (Coupe, 2000)

#### 4.1 The Main Tenets of Ecocriticism

As is common in the circles of science, the words 'oikos' and 'kritis' alias 'eco' and 'critics' come from ancient Greek and together they mean 'the house judge'. One of the most conversant ecocritic experts, William Howarth, presented his interpretation of this word grouping as follows: „*It is a person who assesses credits and failures of texts which portrays consequences the culture has on the nature, scolding natural plunders, celebrating natural miracles and through political influence to remedy the damage plunders cost.*”<sup>2</sup> Howard says that in spite of the fact we separate culture and nature as totally unrelated and different subjects, in fact they are mixing and connecting together like sugar with coffee. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

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<sup>1</sup> GARRARD, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. First published. New York: the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> GLOTFELTY, Cheryll a Harold FROMM. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. First. Athens, Georgia: the University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. 69.

If the person wants to call himself/herself ecocriticism expert he/she has to differentiate four ecocriticism branches. Every discipline emphasize the relationship between literature and nature as volatile fluctuating forms. We distinguish: The language, ethics, critics and ecology. Language considers how the human and nonhuman life is contained in words. The ethical dimension allows us to mediate historical social conflicts, on the other hand, critics assesses the quality and integrity of works and promotes their dissemination and finally ecology as an interdisciplinary science explains the relations between culture and nature in general. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

According to Howarth we are familiar with the nature through words and depictions, which creates a process of showing off that the verity in science is inevitable and these two forms are parallel no matter if we look up the dates or metaphors. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

Again according to Howarth the main reason of freely developing of ecocriticism is that its authors often use similar motifs such as: City, Nature, Countryside, Region, Environment or Place and they lack the feeling of need of basic rules but because disciplinary prejudices remain the same they hardly enrich themselves. (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996)

#### 4.2 Ecocriticism in Relation with Nature Narration

According to Timothy Clark the term of 'nature writing' describes a sort of originative literature which is connected with wilderness and countryside. Over time, this term has been replaced by the term 'environment'. There is no such nature on the planet, but there are still different environments that are more inviolable than others. Clark adds that 'nature' has long been a decisive and probably definitive term for Western traditions of ideas and maybe 'the word which contains the longest list of related terms in the language'. Clark asserts that constant attribute of the most demanding work is that human culture realm is not reference spot and context. Due to Clark's opinions literature and environmental scripts are studied by ecocriticism through these rival 'nature' approaches in the foreground. (Clark, 2011) According to Beegel, today we consider environment a natural background of the humankind. Plants

and animals with special emphasis on the damages caused by humans and the need of rectification. (Beegel,1997)

## 5 JOHN STEINBECK'S INFLUENCE, BIOGRAPHY and ORIGINS

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California. His parents were the second generation of American settlers in California. Varied blood circled in Steinbeck's veins. His grandfather, John Adolph Grossteinbeck, after whom he had inherited the part of his family name, was a German immigrant who came to America sometime in the 1860s. He met Almira Dickinson in quite unforeseen destination of the holy town of Jerusalem. They got married soon and after a short sojourn in New England they moved to California where Grossteinbeck bought a small plot of land at Salinas and established a creamery. The family turned the area into a fruit farm and founded a successful mill. As because of the first grandparent Steinbeck's genealogy contained German origins the older from two of Steinbeck's grandparents, Samuel Hamilton, delivered an Irish blood. A man from a poor Irish family was looking for a path to wealth in the Far West of the United States to eventually move to San Jose, California. The family moved after twenty years spent in San Jose to Salinas near King City in California where Hamilton set up a small but growing ranch. Unfortunately, the arid land of the countryside around Salinas caused the ranch wasn't much productive despite all the hard work. (Schultz, Li, 2005)

Steinbeck's beloved mother, Olive Hamilton, as usual habit of loving mothers, influenced little John a lot. She worked as a school teacher and led him to conscious the importance of a language and its meaningfulness and depth and not only that. She also initiated John into legends and myths of the Western literature. (Schultz, Li, 2005)

John Ernst Steinbeck, the father of his famous son, most of the life worked in the financial sphere, particularly as a teller of County in Monterey. Despite or maybe because of his office career Steinbeck's father loved spending time in the nature riding his horse around the countryside or working in the garden. His passion was reflected in the life and soul of little John, who spent the summer working on the Hamilton ranch. (Schultz, Li, 2005)

For Steinbeck his grandparents symbolized the prototype of the human need of a constant romantic effort to find in the cruel desert world relative personal happiness and fulfillment of their often unrealistic dreams. Throughout his life and creative work, he

often returned to that thought, confronting it with reality in his stories, often ruthless. (Schultz, Li, 2005)

Another person who has greatly influenced John Steinbeck's adult life was the marine biologist Edward Ricketts. Steinbeck and Ricketts got to know each other in 1930 in Pacific Grove, California, where Steinbeck inhabited his parent's summer house. He attended Stanford classes while working at the Hopkins Marine Laboratory whereas Ricketts frequented the University of Chicago. Ricketts affected Steinbeck's interest in science and biology as well as his literal and philosophic way of thinking. According to Susan Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw and W. N. Tiffney there was an accent on the idea of ecology and study was concentrated on the relation between the physical environment and organisms in connection with the early motto of American ecological societies: 'All forms of life in relation to the environment' in 1930s. Ecology has become a rooted and respected science discipline. Three previously mentioned authors add that under the term of environment Steinbeck and Ricketts they did not imagine the same thing as we do today, however it symbolized the area occupying the space around flora and fauna, such as weather, air, water or its salinity and temperature. (Beegel, Shillinglaw, Tiffney, Jr., 1997)

Thanks to a friendship between Ricketts Steinbeck had visited to the hitherto uncharted part of his author life as he and Ricketts had been studying invertebrate marine animals six weeks aboard the expedition to the California coast. Steinbeck elaborated their common findings in the joint book of the Sea of Cortez, which, which, unlike his usual prose, also contained entirely scientific knowledge. (Schultz, Li, 2005)

This expedition, along with friendship with the marine biologist, led to Steinbeck's love and respect for the ocean and its many depictions and symbolism in his works.

## 5.1 Steinbeck's Natural View

To begin with, I would like to emphasize Shillinglaw's note, which she presents in her book. In other words, John Steinbeck, through his detailed and detailed description of the landscape, invites the reader to be able to accurately equip the environment in which the characters are. To notice the diversity of the environment in which he grew up and the fate of the people in it fighting their everyday fights. Steinbeck constantly

follows the outer world, and for him the surface structure includes the names of things, the eccentricity of man and the physicality of the place. His close and lifelong link to the landscape of Monterey County was reflected in most of his prose. He simply could not deny it. (Shillinglaw, 2006)

According to Richard E. Hart in the beginning of his career Steinbeck was an 'earth narrator', the member of natural legitimacy and natural tenets as well as a student, observer and guard of natural uniqueness and unrepeatability. (Beegel, 1997)

Susan Shillinglaw presents Steinbeck with an idea of human interaction with nature that he declared in a notebook while writing *To a God unknown*. (Shillinglaw, 2006) In his natural postures Steinbeck was strongly influenced by the environment where he was born and grew up. People there were closely linked to the land that gave them home and living. During times of his childhood he witnessed how traditional family farms had to retreat before industrial agriculture. It affected not only the landscape as such, but also the fates and customs of people who lived in family ranches. Steinbeck experienced these changes as a teenager very heavily. (Kopecký, 2012)

## 6 The WAYWARDS BUS

Firstly I would like to introduce shortly *The Wayward Bus* as the most underrated novels of John Steinbeck. „Published in February 1947, “the Bus,” as Steinbeck referred to it in his letters, was his first long and much-anticipated novel after *The Grapes of Wrath* eight years earlier and his last big novel before *East of Eden* five years later. With ten major characters, however, the novel’s unconventional ensemble cast or its unorthodox moral code or its overtly allegorical form may have limited its popularity. But make no mistake: “*The Bus*” is a main novel by significant American author and it deserves to attract a new generation of readers.“<sup>3</sup>

The *Wayward Bus* was my first contact with Steinbeck’s fascinating prose. „Steinbeck struck on the premise for the story in Mexico in the spring of 1945 while completing *The Pearl*. Originally he thought he would develop the idea in a tale of picaresque adventure “something like the *Don Quixote of Mexico*” or in a short novel the length of *The Red Pony* (1937). Gradually, however, the story of these pilgrims and their journey swelled into an ambitious novel of more than a hundred thousand words.“<sup>4</sup>

„Published to great fanfare, *The Wayward Bus* was an immediate bestseller. It enjoyed a first printing of 750,000 copies and was a *Book-of-the-Month Club* selection.“<sup>5</sup>

### 6.1 Plot Summary

On *Rebels Corners* somewhere down in California lives Juan Chicoy, the man of mixed race, who is partly Mexican, Indian and Irish. Juan leads a small restaurant and a car repair with Gas pump with his wife Alice. The whole novel describes the way of a group of people who have barely anything in common, however they have the same intent: To get to the town San Juan by Juan’s old bus. On the bus with Juan as a driver is his employee Pimples Carson, who is helping Juan with repairing his old bus and

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<sup>3</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 13-14.

doing stuff around car repair. He is an ugly, desperate auto mechanic who tries to suppress his life disillusion by dissipated eating of candy. Besides of Pimples we meet Ernest Horton who experienced the war on the front line and he is now making his living as an instrument of civilization: Business traveler. We can find there Pritchard, a snobby salesman with his cold fished wife, who is excellent at convincing her husband that he always thinks exactly the same as she does. Another passenger is Norma, a simpleheaded forlorn girl who rejects to leave her dreams to be a wife of a famous movie star Clark Gable. Traveling with her parents there is Mildred, Pritchard's daughter, smart and pretty university student, not yet devastated by civilization. The last passenger is Kamila who is a gorgeous girl, dealing with life only thanks to unflinching admiration of every man she meets. As it was said before, the whole novel describes the way of all these people to San Juan.

Later on the way they are hit by the rainstorm as it is a raining period in California during their journey. Raging river snatches off the only bridge to San Juan and passengers unanimously agree to try the old and unused way across the mountains to get to San Juan. However, the bus gets stucked into the mud and Juan, taking advantage of the situation, escapes from the bus on purpose of leaving Alice, angry passengers and his formal life behind his back under the pretext he's going for help. During this crisis there escalate some serious conflicts between some of the passengers. Pimples tries gradually to seduce Kamila and when he fails he turns his attention to Norma and loses again. Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard get into the quarrel and Pritchard rapes his wife. Disgusted Mrs. Pritchard leaves following Juans footprints in the mud. She finds Juan in the old barn and after their conversation she sleeps with him. However, after this short moment of insurgency they realize that they are trapped in their way of life and the only option is a return. They dig the bus up and finish their way to San Juan.

## 6.2 Ecocritical Analysis

In the Wayward bus, as it is palpable from many other Steinbeck's novels, we can feel certain aversion against proceeding process of civilization. Not concretely on its particular elements like machines, industry and whatsoever, but he assumes that thanks to the people and their civilization progress our life becomes alienated from the nature and its natural order. People who do not have the opportunity to follow their dreams and

wills because of conditions which take a huge part of their lives they are stacked in the middle of something they really don't want to be inside at all. It is a vicious circle and mostly there is no escape from it. People have their own routine and are expected to behave in a way that the society wants and there is no space to change. That is exactly the case of Juan, who, for a first sight, seems to be quite a happy man. He has his own little restaurant and quite optimal conditions for living, he doesn't have to fight for his life or starve to death. However, after some events we realize that this is not the way he wants to go until the end of his days. When he escapes led by a spontaneous idea of freedom he hides in the old barn where, after an affair with like-minded Mildred, they realize that their escape doesn't have a change for a success. Stacked at the very end of vicious circle they are forced to return to their formal lives.

Steinbeck's life wasn't always easy. Thanks to the period of time he lived in, particularly to a crisis in the 1930s he had to make everything possible for a living. Probably that is one of the main reasons for that he always sympathized with outsiders. Maybe not always outsiders, but surely with people who somehow had to fight their way through life and nevertheless the obstacles they tried to find the way to some kind of happiness. He admires the nature and its miscellaneous beauties. Through the tough times he experienced he always find consolation and comfort in the natural environs. His language, when concerned with natural background, is always rich and various. Let me demonstrate on a few extracts from a book. „*Anyone who wishes to go from the inland valley to the coast in this part of the state must take the road that begins at Rebel Corners and winds through hills and a little desert and through farmland and mountains until, at last, it comes to the coastal highway right in the middle of the town of San Juan de la Cruz.*“<sup>6</sup>

We can fully recognize Steinbeck's ability to depict every single nature element, which pervades many parts of his novels. However, he adds every single one of them nonviolently, naturally and thanks to his uncomplicated, comfortable point of view we can almost feel the atmosphere, although we have never been anywhere down there in California. „*The gray wall of water obscured the hills and there was a dark, metallic light with it. The heads of the lupines bent down, heavy with water. The petals of the poppies were beaten off and lay on the ground like gold coins. The already wet ground*

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<sup>6</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 38.

*could absorb no more water, and little rivulets started immediately for the low places. The cloudburst roared on the roof of a lunchroom at Rebel Corners* “<sup>7</sup> According to this particular part I would like to point out on how spreading and wide Steinbeck’s description of the basic natural process is, In this case raining. „*The rain had stopped and only the drips from the white oaks fell on the roof. The land was soggy, water-beaten, sodden. The grain, fat and heavy with the damp, rich springtime, had lain heavily down under the last downpour, so that it stretched away in tired waves. The water trickled and ran and gurgled and rushed to find low places in the fields. The ditches beside the state highway were full, and in some places the water even invaded the raised road. Everywhere there was a whisper of water and a rush of water. The golden poppies were all stripped of their petals now, and the lupines lay down like the grain, too fat, too heavy, to hold up their heads.*“<sup>8</sup>

Again I wanted to demonstrate the enthusiasm which provides authors description of natural background. However, it is not only the nature itself Steinbeck cares about. We, human beings, are for quite a long time inseparable part of nature. We are taking advantages from the nature and unfortunately, we sometimes abuse her. What Steinbeck thought and what all of us should realize is that We, the people, need mother nature to survive. The nature doesn’t need humankind at all for instead. We should find a peaceful way of coexisting together with it or someday we will be regretting that it is already too late. As well as eco critics is about people as parts of the environment, Steinbeck in his personal way focused on people. He gives his main or secondary characters plenty of space, describing their appearance, behavior, character or actions.

In the story, Steinbeck reserves quite an unusual amount of space in concern to delineate us the appearance of his characters. Not only their look, but also what the person emanates from her/himself, which grimes he/she makes in particular situation. While the reader find him/herself in the middle of a section where the description appears he/she can almost feels like standing in front of the character described. From that point of view, Steinbeck is very unique. There of course has to be readers who find his particularized depiction pointless. However, despite their conviction they are able to see Steinbeck’s work just from the one point of view. Unrestrained fantasy imagination is not the point here. The author tries to present us the exact view he wants us to be

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<sup>7</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 109-110.

familiar with. Of course nobody is forbidden of creating his/her picture of a plot though without losing the mood of a story if possible. At the very beginning of the second chapter of the book the author introduces us his main character, Juan. „*Juan picked a striped mechanic's cap from his workbench. He wore Headlight overalls with big brass buttons on bib and side latches, and over this he wore a black horsehide jacket with black knitted wristlets and neck. His shoes were round-toed and hard, with soles so thick that they seemed swollen. An old scar on his cheek beside his large nose showed as a shadow in the overhead light. He ran fingers through his thick, black hair to get it all in the mechanic's cap. His hands were short and wide and strong, with square fingers and nails flattened by work and grooved and twisted from having been hammered and hurt. The third finger of his left hand had lost the first joint, and the flesh was slightly mushroomed where the finger had been amputated. This little overhanging ball was shiny and of a different texture from the rest of the finger, as though the joint were trying to become a fingertip, on this finger he wore a wide gold wedding ring, as though this finger was no good for work any more and might as well be used for ornament.*”<sup>9</sup> The deformed finger points out to naturalism as a literary tradition within the narrative method which uses realistic descriptions aiming at objectivity. The wedding ring refers to ironic detachment from human feelings such as love. The frequent parallel between human and animal world points out to the literary tradition of naturalism, namely the detailed physical description of the character's face. „*Juan was clean-shaven, but not since yesterday, and along the corners of his chin and on his neck the coming whiskers were grizzled and white like those of an old Airedale. This was the more ap-parent because the rest of his beard was so intensely black.*”<sup>10</sup> However, what makes Steinbeck the influential writer of the tradition of naturalism is the portrayal of his characters' good humour and carelessness of heart. „*His black eyes were squinting and humorous, the way a man's eyes squint when he is smoking and cannot take the cigarette from his mouth. And Juan's mouth was full and good, a relaxed mouth, the underlip slightly protruding not in petulance but in humor and self-confidence.*“<sup>11</sup>

Steinbeck describes even details which you do not recognize normally if you meet someone for the first time and even if you already know the person. As a second example to demonstrate Steinbeck's way of depicting a person I chose Pimples Carson.

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<sup>9</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 51.

In my point of view, one of the saddest characters in the book. „*Pimples wore the tattered sweater of a motorcycle club and the crown of a felt hat cut in saw teeth around the edge. He was a lank and slender-waisted boy of seventeen, with narrow shoulders and a long foxy nose and eyes that were pale in the morning and became green-ish-brown later in the day. A golden fuzz was on his cheeks, and his cheeks were rivuleted and rotted and eroded with acne. Among the old scars new pustules formed, purple and red, some rising and some waning. The skin was shiny with the medicines that were sold for this condition and which do no good whatever.*”<sup>12</sup> The realistic details of the description emphasize the character's ugliness and poor life conditions. Therefore they reflect life pessimism and social determination of the character. His name points out to the fact he is a model character and the nickname, rather than a real name, illustrates his physical appearance. „*Pimples' blue jeans were tight, and so long that they were turned up ten inches on the bottoms. They were held to his narrow middle by a broad, beautifully tooled leather belt with a fat and en-graved silver buckle in which four turquoises were set. Pimples kept his hands at his sides as much as he could, but in spite of himself his fingers would move to his pitted cheeks until he became conscious of what he was doing and put his hands down again. He wrote to every company, knew that it would probably go away in a few years. They nevertheless gave Pimples prescriptions for salves and lotions, and one had put him on a diet of green vegetables.*”<sup>13</sup> The author uses animal-human parallels repeatedly, including the animal like instincts of the character and his way of life. „*His eyes were long and narrow and slanted like the eyes of a sleepy wolf, and now in the early morning they were almost sealed shut with mucus. Pimples was a prodigious sleeper. Left to his own devices, he could sleep nearly all the time. His whole system and his soul were a particularly violent battleground of adolescence.*”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the author leaves space for human feelings such as religious sentiments which are later driven over by passionate instincts. „*His concupiscence was constant, and when it was not directly and openly sexual it would take to channels of melancholy, of deep and tearful sentiment, or of a strong and musky religiosity. His mind and his emotions were like his face, constantly erupting, constantly raw and irritated. He had times of violent purity when he howled at his own depravity, and these were usually followed by a melancholy laziness that all but prostrated him,*

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<sup>12</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 52-53.

<sup>14</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 53.

*and he went from the depression into sleep. It was opiate and left him drugged and dull for a long time.*<sup>15</sup>

In the last paragraph of the extract from the book describing Pimples and also at the end of Juan's description you can find another interesting aspect of Steinbeck's writing. He assimilates people's appearance to their behavior, character and life experiences. Maybe not always assimilates, but connects and separates at the same time. For example: Juan is a charismatic southerner who emanates respect, independence, self-confidence and ability of taking care of problems. His scars and appearance imperfections do not cause contempt as in Pimple's case, they symbolize experience and leadership. Like an old knight strengthened by a great many of battles. In the narrow and convoluted paths of his mind we can find sadness, misery and disillusion, but he is still strong enough to deal with it. Pimples on the other hand is a walking misery himself. As I mention before, his appearance imperfections cause nothing but contempt or compassion. He behaves like a broken man, hiding his life demotivation into certain lewdness and pessimistic self-reflection. However, hidden contexts of the whole story leads me to an idea, that Juan and Pimples do not differ as much as it looks. I can feel it the most in the basic detail. Juan calls Pimples 'Kit', because Pimples likes it better. He obviously compassions with Pimples more than anyone else. Steinbeck leads us to the idea, that even the most different people with dissimilar appearance, behavior and character can have similar mind processes. His concern about these connections with people and other people or a nature background is very strong and it is the same in the *Wayward bus*. Another idea for a reader after reading is that under the first screen there is some kind of disillusion in the whole coexistence of characters. They all have their own personality, social status and the way they deal with life. For the first sight it seems that no one can be as different as Pimples and Juan are. However, the strongest thing that connects them is that they are disappointed by their life paths in some way. Regarding Steinbeck's life experiences I wasn't surprised by his demotivation. His works reflect the way he had to deal with economical crisis, things were not easy these days. That fact is even more reflected in another Steinbeck's book. In the ecocriticism way we can present another short story where we can get even closer to author's attachment to human beings. I would rather say: The human beings admiring and

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<sup>15</sup> STEINBECK, John. *The Wayward Bus*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 53.

enjoying life despite unsatisfactory economic and social conditions. What's more, their simple existence is filled with freedom and the desire to live more than anything else.

## 7 CANNERY ROW

*„Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, “whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,” by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, “Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,” and he would have meant the same thing.“<sup>16</sup>*

The Picaresque novel with a humorous detached view tells a story about the life of several peculiar layabouts on the suburbs of a little town in California during the times before WWII. Free sequence of stories of tragicomic tuning is associated with dramatic characters who live in a shelter on the outskirts of the city with no money and no worries about the future and whose life philosophy corresponds to an unconventional environment. Their fate is connected by the impressive figure of an intellectual scientist who participates in their problems with forgiveness and affectionate participation. The book is an impressive documentary of the author's brilliant narrative and his deep love for people. We also simply cannot overlook one inconspicuous character completing the view of people living in the Cannery Row. It is Lee Chong, the Chinese owner of goods of all sorts, who is open from morning to dawn, and who looks like a cunning and rugged merchant, sells his neighbors to debt without expecting to pay it back. From other residents of Cannery Row, I exclude the leader of a group of poor homeless layabouts Mack. Mack on the other hand manages to exploit his man a bit, but on the other hand, he does not hesitate to take full responsibility for failed celebration of Doctor's birthday, when almost all the equipment of the laboratory has been destroyed, and he voluntarily leaves several teeth after the punch from the Doctor's fist.

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<sup>16</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 12.

## 7.1 Ecocritical Analysis

As presented during previous analysis of the Wayward Bus we can certainly recognize deep criticism of the society divided into unequal classes in Steinbeck's works. Especially in his major famous books as *Of Mice and Men* or *Grapes of Wrath*. Author's dissatisfaction with social background during times before and shortly after the WWII is capable to convince an unacquainted reader that he projects that kind of misery into every single page. However, beside of certain pessimism *Cannery Row* maybe more than any other Steinbeck's works reflects a humorous detached view on mostly poor and simple people who made their poverty a benefit. This tendency is palpable particularly in this extract from the 2nd chapter of the book. „*Mack and the boys, too, spinning in their orbits. They are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure certain food, where men to „secure certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them. In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row.*”<sup>17</sup>

Here we find one of many proofs of Steinbeck's love for ordinary people and often even social outcroppings, the tendency to glorify their actions and admire their ability to enjoy life fully despite their bleak life situation. „*What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums. Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys. Virtues and graces and laziness and zest. Our Father who art in nature*”<sup>18</sup> Natural aspect in the very final phrase: 'Our Father who art in nature' is well recognizable. As well as in the *Wayward Bus* Steinbeck uses his emphatic critics through the vivid

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<sup>17</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 25.

narration and comparison. However, he uses some kind of exaggeration in contrast with his major critical works and he stultifies self-styled higher class with his own specific way.

Steinbeck's typical way of connecting people with their natural environment is noticeable in many extracts from the book. Strange but poetic in some way may be considered this part from the 4th chapter.: *„In the evening just at dusk, a curious thing happened on Cannery Row. Down the hill, past the Palace Flophouse, down the chicken walk and through the vacant lot came an old Chinaman. He wore an ancient flat straw hat, blue jeans, both coat and trousers, and heavy shoes of which one sole was loose so that it slapped the ground when he walked. In his hand he carried a covered wicker basket. His face was lean and brown and corded as jerky and his old eyes were brown, even the whites were brown and deep set so that they looked out of holes. No one saw him again until dawn.“*<sup>19</sup> The Old Chinaman is again a representative of the kind of people we might not be able to see as successful from the point of view of the industrial society. However, only his appearance wakes people in respect and perhaps fear. Steinbeck points out that these people are parallels to nature. Mysterious, insignificant, yet living in some kind of harmony with their surroundings.

In the beginning of the 6th chapter we can find another interesting phenomenon which provides Steinbeck's work. It is the ocean. It can be found inconspicuous, however, Steinbeck's relationship to the ocean influences many of his fictional or non-fictional characters.<sup>20</sup> *„Doc was collecting marine animals in the Great Tide Pool on the tip of the Peninsula. It is a fabu-lous place: when the tide is in, a wave-churned basin, creamy with foam, whipped by the combers that roll in from the whistling buoy on the reef. But when the tide goes out the little water world becomes quiet and lovely. The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals. Crabs rush from frond to frond of the waving algae. Starfish squat over mussels and limpets, attach their million little suckers and then slowly lift with incredible power until the prey is broken from the rock. Orange and speckled and fluted nudibranchs slide gracefully over the rocks, their skirts waving like the dresses of*

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<sup>19</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Log from the Sea of Cortez was published in 1951. It details a six-week (March 11 – April 20) marine specimen-collecting boat expedition Steinbeck made in 1940 at various sites in the Gulf of California (also known as the Sea of Cortez), with his friend, the marine biologist Ed Ricketts. He describes the ocean and its treasures with respect, love and passion, blending with respect and admiration.

*Spanish dancers. And black eels poke their heads out of crevices and wait for prey. The snapping shrimps with their trigger claws pop loudly. The lovely, colored world is glassed over.”*<sup>21</sup>

Ocean is not the only water symbol which symbolize freedom, purity and celebrates the connection of the nature and people.: *„The Carmel is a lovely little river. It isn't very long but in its course it has everything a river should have. It rises in the mountains, and tumbles down a while, runs through shallows, is dammed to make a lake, spills over the dam, crackles among round boulders, wanders lazily under sycamores, spills into pools where trout live, drops in against banks where crayfish live. In the winter it becomes a torrent, a mean little fierce river, and in the summer it is a place for children to wade in and for fishermen to wander in. Frogs blink from its banks and the deep ferns grow beside it. Deer and foxes come to drink from it, secretly in the morning and evening, and now and then a mountain lion crouched flat laps its water. The farms of the rich little valley back up to the river and take its water for the orchards and the vegetables. The quail call beside it and the wild doves come whistling in at dusk. Raccoons pace its edges looking for frogs. It's everything a river should be.“*<sup>22</sup> Steinbeck's love of water as a donor of life is tangible in his commentaries of the ocean, the river, or the rain. He considers the congregation of nature and creatures living in it as the greatest miracle of the world. He presents the water as an elixir of life, which it in fact really is. Mankind is somewhat extraordinary in this symbiosis. People who engage in this symbiosis and worship nature in its natural beauty are, according to Steinbeck, the only ones worthy of enjoying the gifts of nature.

Despite the apparent glorification of his characters, Steinbeck does not make any martyrs. Mack and his bunch are hangers who are, on the one hand, romantic seekers of freedom and happiness out of wealth and corporate poaching, on the other hand, they are a snarling, lying, deceiving and stealing others just to make their lives as easy as possible. However, in Steinbeck's Cannery Row, even the greatest mischief is not without conscience, which demonstrates the unexpected leak of self-reflection Mack presents in the book.: *„Here we are,” he said earnestly, “the whole God damned shabby lot of us. We worked it out that we wanted to give Doc a party. So we come out here and have a hell of a lot of fun. Then we'll go back and get the dough from Doc. There's five*

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<sup>21</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 90-91.

*of us, so we'll drink five times as much liquor as he will. And I ain't sure we're doin' it for Doc. I ain't sure we ain't doin' it for ourselves. And Doc's too nice a fella to do that to. Doc is the nicest fella I ever knew. I don't want to be the kind of guy that would take advantage of him. You know one time I put the bee on him for a buck. I give him a hell of a story. Right in the middle I seen he knew God damn well the story was so much malarkey. So right in the middle I says, 'Doc, that's a fuggin' lie!' And he put his hand in his pocket and brought out a buck. 'Mack,' he says, 'I figure a guy that needs it bad enough to make up a lie to get it, really needs it,' and he give me the buck. I paid him that buck back the next day. I never did spend it. Just kept it overnight and then give it back to him.*"<sup>23</sup>

The echoes of Steinbeck's love of nature that we have mentioned several times could be found in all his works. He emphasizes it above all humanity and, with respect, we can read paragraphs immersed in the beauty of the landscape. In *Cannery Row*, perhaps thanks to the author's nostalgia or the relationship to his homeland and the place where he was born, we witness an interesting concept. At the beginning of one chapter, love for nature as such connects to the otherwise bleak landscape of the secluded coastal town, full of rubbish, mess, smelly corners, iron and steel. Though Steinbeck's comment may seem to be full of resentment that might be related to his idea that people with their civilization are somewhat extra an unnecessary in natural world, it is not such easy. He comments on it not just in the plane of contrast, but in the creation of a special symbiosis that creates the image of a new world, which, though much differently, creates a strange and unorthodox paradox that transforms ugliness into an unusual representation of beauty. „*Early morning is a time of magic in Cannery Row. In the gray time after the light has come and before the sun has risen, the Row seems to hang suspended out of time in a silvery light. The street lights go out, and the weeds are a brilliant green. The corrugated iron of the canneries glows with the pearly lucency of platinum or old pewter. No automobiles are running then. The street is silent of progress and business. And the rush and drag of the waves can be heard as they splash in among the piles of the canneries. It is a time of great peace, a deserted time, a little era of rest. Cats drip over the fences and slither like syrup over the ground to look for fish heads. Silent early morning dogs parade majestically picking and choosing*

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<sup>23</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 96-97.

*judiciously whereon to pee. The sea gulls come flapping in to sit on the cannery roofs to await the day of refuse. They sit on the roof peaks shoulder to shoulder.*"<sup>24</sup>

At the end of this ode on the unusual morning beauty of the ugly place Steinbeck adds.: *„It is the hour of the pearl the interval between day and night when time stops and examines itself.*"<sup>25</sup>

The character of a marine biologist, the renamed Doctor, was unmistakably inspired by Steinbeck's lifelong friend and source of inspiration, Edward Ricketts. In 17th chapter Steinbeck narrates: *„Once when Doc was at the University of Chicago he had love trouble and he had worked too hard. He thought it would be nice to take a very long walk. He put on a little knapsack and he walked through Indiana and Kentucky and North Carolina and Georgia clear to Florida. He walked among farmers and mountain people, among the swamp people and fishermen. And everywhere people asked him why he was walking through the country. Because he loved true things, he tried to explain.*"<sup>26</sup>

In this part of the book Steinbeck discusses the doctor's personality and reflects his view of the world. We can only guess whether this is a real and comprehensive statement about Steinbeck's real friend Ricketts, whether the doctor's character is inspired by other circumstances. In any case, Steinbeck sees in his judgment a bit parallel to Juan of Wayward Bus. Respectful, sharp and in the doctor's case very well educated man surrounded by friends and the supposed ideal of well being, but in his heart lonely and doubtful, trying to find sense in his actions. *„In spite of his friendliness and his friends Doc was a lonely and a set-apart man. Mack probably noticed it more than anybody. In a group, Doc seemed always alone. When the lights were on and the curtains drawn, and the Gregorian music played on the great phonograph, Mack used to look down on the laboratory from the Palace Flophouse. He knew Doc had a girl in there, but Mack used to get a dreadful feeling of loneliness out of it. Even in the dear close contact with a girl Mack felt that Doc would be lonely.*"<sup>27</sup>

In spite of all the troubles beginning as a the little bruises and ending as unintentional dismantling of the Doctor's Laboratory, Mack and his band were for him

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<sup>24</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 121-122.

<sup>27</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 118.

the major thing that made his life in Cannery Row bearable and essentially filled. They liked him and, as the only ones, did not deny the honest but often unmoved effort to make the Doctor's life more pleasant, not only to make use of him. Steinbeck adds with a little bit of extras: „*Mack and the boys - the Virtues, the Beatitudes, the Beauties. They sat in the Palace Flophouse and they were the stone dropped in the pool, the impulse which sent out ripples to all of Cannery Row and beyond, to Pacific Grove, to Monterey, even over the hill to Carmel.*“<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Cannery Row*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992, p. 190.

## 8 TORTILLA FLAT

Is a short story written by John Steinbeck in 1935. This book is part of the author's early works and is one of his most important tickets to world literature. Although it was accepted very positively, there were also quite critical voices, to which Steinbeck responded in the foreword. He writes that when he wrote the book he did not find paisanos curious or quaint, dispossessed or underdogish. He regards them as people whom he knows and likes, people who merge successfully with their habitat. He adds that if he known that these stories and these people would be considered quaint he never should have written them. (Tortilla Flat, 1937)

Through a story about a little school friend whom they called 'piojo' and his sister whom they called 'hour-lady' and whom had to sustain herself and her little brother working as a prostitute. Steinbeck tries to clarify the true motives. He writes: „*Perhaps this is shocking. It doesn't seem to me. Perhaps it is quaint-God help it. I have been subjected to decency for a long time, and still I Can't think of the hour-lady as (That nastiest of words) a prostitute, not of piojo's many uncles, tase jolly men who sometimes gave us nickels, as her clients. All of this gets around to the point that this is not and introduction, but a conclusion. I wrote these stories because they were true stories and because I liked them. But literary slummers have taken these people up with the vulgarity of duchesses who are amused and sorry for a peasantry. These stories are out and I cannot recall them. But I shall never again subject to the vulgar touch of the decent these good people of laughter and kindness, of honest and direct eyes, of courtesy beyond politeness. If I have done them harm by telling a few of their stories, I am sorry. It will not happen again.*”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 2-3.

## 8.1 Plot Summary

This is a story about Danny, his friends and his house. It is a story about the triple fused in one, so that in Tortilla Flat if you speak of Danny's house you do not mean a structure of wood flaked with old whitewash, overgrown with an ancient untrimmed rose of Castile. No, when you speak of Danny's house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow. For Danny's house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny's friends were not unlike the Round Table and not even the knights of it. This is a story of how that group are into being, of how it flourished and grew to be an organization beautiful and wise. This story deals with the adventuring of Danny's friends, with the good they did, with their thoughts and their endeavors. In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated. (Tortilla Flat, 1937)

## 8.2 Ecocritical Analysis

Tortilla Flat is another alternative to John Steinbeck's humorous short novels. In some editions, including my own, even those two short novels created a twin-tale that combined a similar view of the world and the people walking it. I will try to illustrate the ecocritical elements in the work and bring the comparison with Cannery Row.

Steinbeck, in his preface, distanced himself from the assumption that his rulers should be merely a fiction and a source of doubt for the pious scientist. Still in a preface he provides us with guides to the idea of the country around Monterey and, above all, the people living in the area, who will then be spoken of.: *„Monterey sits on the slope of a hill, with a blue bay below it and with forest of tall dark pine trees at its back. The lower parts of the town are inhabited by Americans, Italians, catchers and canners of fish. But on the hill where the streets are innocent of asphalt and the corners free of street lights, the old inhabitants of Monterey are embattled as the Ancient Britons are embattled in Wales. These are the paisanos.“*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 10-11.

The author, as in previous works, has chosen the source of his narrative as a sort of people living according to old habits, unspoiled by industrial development and more or less living in the original symbiosis with nature. He writes: „*The paisanos are clean of commercialism, free of the complicat-ed systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stole, exploited or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them very vigorously.*”<sup>31</sup>

Steinbeck informs us of the origin of paisanos as a nation of Spanish, Indian, Mexican, and Caucasian blood whose ancestors lived in California 100 to 200 years ago. He speaks English with a Paisan accent and Spanish with a Paisan accent. When he comes to speak of his race, he claims indignantly that he is a purebred spaniel, and the swarthy shade of his skin is attributed to the sun. (Tortilla Flat, 1937)

From the point of view of ecocritical considerations, when I read the fourth chapter, I was struck by a parallel to the Cannery Row. Steinbeck remembers the morning beauties, usually not so many interesting landscapes after which people are walking all day long. „*It is a time of quiet joy, the sunny morning. When glittery dew is on the mallow weeds, each leaf holds a jewel which is beautiful if not valuable. This is no time for hurry or for bustle. Thoughts are slow and deep and golden in the morning.*”<sup>32</sup>

A detailed and involved style describing both the environment and the people in it is reflected in the countless passages of the book, for example at the beginning of the fifth chapter: „*The afternoon came down as imperceptibly as age comes to a happy man. A little gold entered into sunlight The bay became bluer and dimpled with shore-wind ripples. Those lonely fishermen who believe that the fish bite at high tide left their rocks and their places were taken by others, who were convinced that the fish bite at low tide.*”<sup>33</sup>

Steinbeck, as is his custom, glorifies simplicity, simplicity and purity of life, not in his religious, or even moral, aspect, but rather in the human, linked to property. In other words, greed and the desire for power and wealth can also break the constant relationship between people. Maybe this is why they focus on heroes who, in their

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<sup>31</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 65.

essence, physically do nothing and enrich their lives through freedom. After Denny's inherited house burned down, narrator writes: „*He had thought over the ruin of his status as a man with a house to rent and all this clutter of necessary decent emotion having been satisfied and swept away he had finally slipped into his true emotion, one of relief that at least one of his burdens was removed - 'If it were still there, I would be covetous of the rent, he thought. My friends have been cool toward me because they owed me money. Now we can be free and happy again.'*”<sup>34</sup>

In the ecocritical analysis of the *Wayward Bus*, we have been puzzled over Steinbeck's extraordinary amount of space to describe characters. Their appearance, the character, the aura they throw on others. It comes from his love for people. Better speaking to people who are his heroes. As we have mentioned many times, people who are plain and living in harmony with their surroundings. Suddenly, we realize the thing we have already mentioned, but which is more obvious here than elsewhere. One obvious fact falls into the puzzle. They are not people as a whole, to whom Steinbeck behaves immeasurably. It's just his heroes, outsiders, who would normally not have noticed, but he gives them the chance to get to the reader's awareness without being the main heroes of the story. At the beginning of the seventh chapter Steinbeck leaves a detailed characteristic of the pirate.: „*A great many people saw the Pirate every day and some laughed at him, and some pitied him. But no one knew him very well, and no one interfered with him. He was a huge, broad man, with a tremendous black and bushy beard. He wore jeans and a blue shirt and he had no hat. In town he wore shoes. There was a shrinking in the Pirate's eyes when he confronted any grown person, the secret look of an animal that would like to run away if it dared tun its back long enough. Because of this expression, the paisanos of Monterey knew that his head had not grown up with the rest of his body. They called him The Pirate because of his beard. Every day people saw him wheeling his barrow of pitch wood about streets until he sold the load. And always in cluster at his heels walked his five dogs.*”<sup>35</sup>

At the time, Dolores "Sweet" Ramirez was interested in Danny's heart or rather a heavy wallet from the rent from the inherited house. In order to gain her heart, she decided to buy her from the local trader of the latest advances of modern times, a vacuum cleaner. The problem was that Tortilla had no electricity, making the vacuum

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<sup>34</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Tortilla Flat*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 81-82.

<sup>35</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Tortilla Flat*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 93-94.

cleaner unusable. However, it did not prevent Dolores from making him rally in the social rankings. (Tortilla Flat, 1937) Here we can see that, while in modern cities, modern advances in the form of electrical appliances were taken for granted and almost a social duty, whereas in by modern facilities Immaculate Tortilla the ownership of the vacuum cleaner, albeit inapplicable, was a social benefit.

In one of the other chapters we can see how Danny and his band have decided to help two women with many children who no longer have resources to feed them. They have stolen food for them, and encouraged by a warm sense of satisfaction and at the same time inviolability of good intentions, that they will be helping people in such ways. (Tortilla Flat, 1937) This leads me to an idea that links Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row again. Both Mack's and Denny's group finds satisfaction in committing criminal, but nonviolent acts, and find shelter and apology for their actions in that they commit these not for themselves but for the needy or the people they love. The question is whether, in Steinbeck's conception, once again, the glorification of the purity of the spirit of the ordinary, or the hint of the natural human endeavor to cross the border and seek adrenaline, bringing to life the essence of fun and extraordinariness.

In a nonaggressive but apparent conflict, Steinbeck is confronting a modern world and nature at the beginning of the fourteenth chapter. *„Clocks and watches were not used by the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. Now and then one of the friends acquired a watch in some extraordinary manner, but he kept it only long enough to trade it for something he really wanted. Watches were in good repute at Danny's house, but only as media of exchange. For practical purposes, there was the great golden watch of the sun. It was better than a watch, and safer, for there was no way of diverting it to Torrelli. In the summer, when the hands of a clock went to seven it is a nice time to get up, but in winter the same time is of no value whatever. How much better is the sun! When he clears the pine tops and clings to the front porch, be it summer or winter, that is the sensible time to get up. That is a time when one's hands do not quiver nor one's belly quake with emptiness.*”<sup>36</sup>

At the end of the book, we get to the passage, where a certain Bob who works as a knacker at Tortilla Flat's decides to pretend he intends to shoot himself because people laugh at him for his inability. But he accidentally shoots off his nose and causing

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<sup>36</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 237-238.

that people laugh him even more. The Pirate will hoe him, and once in a while he will put him on the skull of all his 5 dogs to make it look like he has all caught them. (Tortilla Flat, 1937) We see that Steinbeck finds in his villains humanity and compassion with those who are on the social ladder even lower than themselves.

In the passage at the end of the book on Denny there is a feeling of bondage and nonfreedom. He remembers the times when he did not belong, and he did not belong to anyone or anything. There is a commitment to the homeland. Danny suddenly finds that even though he is not a civilized citizen bound by his everyday duty to go to work, he was best when he was the rogue who did not have to worry about anything and no one. (Tortilla Flat, 1937) Through this reasoning, we are unexpectedly closest to Steinbeck's attempt to convey that the happiest person is when he attains his desires and ideals that are based on freedom and independence, not in the possession. *„Time is more complex near the sea than in any other place, for in addition to the circling of the sun and the turning of the seasons, the waves beat out the passage of time on the rocks and the tides rise and fall as a great clepsydra. Danny began to feel the beating of time. He looked at his friends and saw how with them every day was the same. When he got out of his bed in the night and stepped over the sleeping paisanos, he was angry with them for being there. Gradually, sitting on the front porch, in the sun, Danny began to dream of the days of his freedom. He had slept in the woods in summer, and in the warm hay of barns when the winter cold was in. The weight of property was not upon him. He longed for that old times again.“*<sup>37</sup>

*„Torelli giggled, a thing so terrible that the paisanos stepped back from him. ‘Because’, he said, ‘the house belongs to me. Danny came to me and sold me his house for twenty-five dollars last night.’”*<sup>38</sup>

After the end of the chapter, Danny is dead. Lost in depression losing the passion to life and his fulfillment, he called for a duel of a man who shot him in self-defense. Steinbeck finally adds the latest ecocritical motif, the motif of death. *„Death is a persona matter, arousing sorrow, despair, fervor or dry-hearted philosophy. Funerals, on the other hand, are social functions. Imagine going to a funeral without first polishing the automobile. Imagine sending flowers to a funeral with no attached*

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<sup>37</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> STEINBECK, John. Tortilla Flat. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 275.

*card to prove you had done the correct thing. In no social institution is the codified ritual of behavior more rigid than in funerals. Dying a man may be loved, hated, mourned, missed, but once dead he becomes the chief ornament of a complicated and formal social celebration.”<sup>39</sup>*

Steinbeck is, in my opinion, suspended by the fact that people, even though they do not know what death actually represents and what the dead have committed during their lives, set a certain face that is expected within a socially acceptable standard. People thus renounce responsibility for their decision making and conceal their true feelings under a blanket of black coat. The alienation through socially accepted and required standards affects all areas in our lives.

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<sup>39</sup> STEINBECK, John. *Tortilla Flat*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937, p. 305-306.

## 9 CONCLUSION

The work deals with John Steinbeck, Nobel Prizewinner and one of the greatest prose writers of the past twentieth century. It comments on his life and adolescence, closely related to the Californian landscape he writes about and where all the short novels are set.

Through the reflection and the collection of facts about the still not well-known scientific field – ecocriticism, the work comments on Steinbeck's connection to the naturalism and Californian landscape. Using the comments of the individual excerpts from *The Wayward Bus*, *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* demonstrate elements of ecocritism in the works and Steinbeck's attitude towards nature, people and their mutual symbiosis. In these short works, Steinbeck is no longer relegated to the unwavering critique of society and its achievements. He rather criticizes alienation from nature as a source of life and highlights characters that in their simplicity are the closest to what he considers to be the symbiosis of nature with humankind. Unlike in other critical novels, Steinbeck does not comment on the situation with insincerity and indignity, but presents a kind of humorous and relaxed view on everyday life in the country where he grew up. His harsh descriptions of the countryside and the ordinary people radiate his love of nature and people who, albeit in the eyes of society can be outcasts and renegades, are able to enjoy natural achievements without harming them.

The work brings not only the correlation between the author, his work and ecocriticism but also summarizes and represents ecocriticism as such. It presents its history and difficult beginnings, maps its gradual rise to the consciousness of the scientific community, and elucidates its main motifs and ideas as a science that is increasingly important to today's world. Nevertheless, the motivation of this work is primarily the presentation of John Steinbeck's beautiful literature, especially his shorter, lesser known and sometimes underestimated titles.

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