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A Comparison between John Steinbeck's Characters – George Milton from 'Of Mice and Men' and Mordeen Saul from 'Burning Bright'

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 3.5.2022

Dibďáková Aneta

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this thesis is the analysis of the characters from John Ernst Steinbeck's play-novelettes 'Of Mice and Men' (1937) and 'Burning Bright' (1950) with a focus on the characters of George Milton and Mordeen Saul. To provide a background for the analysis of the characters, the work first concentrates on the author and the works themselves. This chapter primarily centers on the motivations of John Steinbeck, provides a relation between the books and his life, and discusses the opposite nature of the two works. Subsequently, the work analyses the characters of George Milton and Mordeen Saul in two ways: their outer appearance, and their psychology and motivation. The analysis provides various facts, such as that Mordeen and George both share their version of the American dream with their companions. This is further developed to establish the similarities of the characters to prove that John Steinbeck had employed recurring character traits, themes, and motivations for his work.

**Key words:** Steinbeck, George Milton, Mordeen Saul, American dream, non-teleological philosophy

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza postav z novel-divadelních her Johna Ernsta Steinbecka 'Of Mice and Men' (1937) a 'Burning Bright' (1950), s hlavním zaměřením na postavy George Milтона a Mordeen Saulové. Nejdříve se práce zaměří na život autora a díla samotná, což je, mimo jiné, důležité i jako základ pro analýzu postav. V rámci této kapitoly se zmíní primárně o motivacích Johna Steinbecka, probere vztah mezi již zmíněnými knihami a životem Johna Steinbecka, a poté se pokusí přiblížit odlišnost těchto děl. Dále následuje samotná analýza postav George Milтона a Mordeen Saulové dvěma způsoby: jejich vnější vzhled, a jejich psychologii a motivaci. Analýza nabízí různá fakta, jako například, že Mordeen a George sdílí jejich verzi Amerického snu s jejich společníky. Toto je dále rozvinuto pro prokázání podobnosti postav jako důkaz, že John Steinbeck používal opakující se charakterové rysy, témata a motivace ve své práci.

**Klíčová slova:** Steinbeck, George Milton, Mordeen Saulová, Americký sen, non-teleologická filozofie

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## Introduction

John Ernst Steinbeck is one of the most prominent American writers. He is known for the works he had written about the era of the Great Depression (1929-1939). The success of his work did not fade away with time, some of his books are part of the American literary canon and Steinbeck is still read. His books are reviewed, discussed, and analyzed by various critics and scholars. The cause of his success during his life and now may be the range of authentic characters, historical themes, or shocking taboos that he had written about. This thesis considers these aspects and develops them further with the focus on the comparison of two of his characters, George Milton and Mordeen Saul, from the works 'Of Mice and Men' (1937) and 'Burning Bright' (1950). The choice of these works is not coincidental, the books have more similarities than just the genre of play-novelette. They share similar themes, such as the American dream and the non-teleological thinking. There also appears a striking differences, such as that 'Of Mice and Men' has become a bestseller, 'Burning Bright' has received heavy criticism and rejection.

'Of Mice and Men' is set in Salinas Valley in California near the Pacific coast during the era of the economic recession in the 1930s, also known as the Great Depression. The book tells the tragic story of the companionship of two people of opposite nature and their work on agricultural farms in order to achieve their version of the American dream. The problem is that they can never make their dream come true because one of them has a severe mental impairment in a society that does not understand and does not accept it as the reasoning for the destructive things he does. Their fate is inevitable, they cannot be escaping forever, the responsible one of the two friends shoots the mentally impaired dead after he has killed a woman on the ranch where they are working.

‘Burning Bright’ has many (circus, hospital, sea, ...) but not one particular setting. This Steinbeck’s play-novelette was written after he suffered from the traumatic divorce from his first wife, and I believe that his inspiration is clear. The work is about a marriage that suffers because there is no child. This leads to the wife’s plan to be unfaithful and conceive the child in secret with another man. Once again, she has no power to change fate, and therefore the truth is eventually revealed to her jealous husband. However, there is no tragic ending, rather with new enlightenment their version of the American dream is fulfilled.

The similarities that arise from the previous discussion are just the beginning of the comparison of George Milton and Mordeen Saul. The thesis will discuss the life of John Ernst Steinbeck with a focus on what has inspired him to write works like ‘Of Mice and Men’ and ‘Burning Bright’. In relation to this, the work will provide a short outline of Steinbeck’s life and the most common themes in his books. This background helps with the understanding of the previously mentioned works, and even the characteristics of George Milton and Mordeen Saul. Then the thesis will continue with the comparison of George and Mordeen in two subchapters concerning their inner and outer appearance. The first subchapter introduces the characters from the first look. It will also attempt to point out the initial similarities between them that are not that evident but more sophisticated. The second subchapter and the main part of the comparison of George Milton and Mordeen Saul will discuss the inner qualities that create the basis and evidence of how similar the two protagonists can be. It discusses their psychology, positive and negative personality traits, and the motivations that are driving forces in their lives.

I hope to achieve a comparison of Mordeen Saul and George Milton to prove that Steinbeck had worked with recurring characters trait and themes, to create a basis for the further research of Steinbeck’s characters, and much more.



# 1 John Steinbeck

John Ernst Steinbeck was a prolific author of American literature and the genre of prose fiction in general. He started his work in the tough times of the 1930s between the two World Wars and had experienced the hardships of the aftermath of both wars and their economical outcomes. Despite this, he succeeded as a writer concerned with common everyday characters and writing about temporary issues of these times. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 for *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and even the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 for his realistic imaginative writing as Stephen K. George writes:<sup>1</sup>

A third generation of Steinbeck scholars and readers now carry his torch, finding in the work of this writer a philosophical probing, an artistic craftsmanship, a courage and compassion that make his books come alive despite a twenty-first-century audience's distance from the Great Depression, World War II, and John F. Kennedy's assassination. There is something self-evident about a writer who can touch a lad in London, a Catholic in Chicago, a Japanese reader in Kyoto, and, in my case, a kid from backwoods Kentucky for whom California was another world.<sup>2</sup>

According to Stephen K. George, one of his most important contributions is sharing historical events in a lively way and being interesting for every possible reader.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Life of John Steinbeck

Steinbeck's life is closely related to his works of art; therefore, it is fundamental to note some important events of his life that inspired his writings. John Ernst Steinbeck was born on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1902 in Salinas, California. He was born into a family with a

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<sup>1</sup> Heavilin, Barbara A., and Stephen K. George. *A John Steinbeck Reader Essays in Honor of Stephen K. George*. Scarecrow Press, 2009.; Railsback, Brian E. "Chronology." *A John Steinbeck Encyclopedia*, by Brian E. Railsback and Michael J. Meyer, Greenwood Press, 2006 xlix-lviii.

<sup>2</sup> George, Stephen K. *John Steinbeck: a Centennial Tribute*. Praeger, 2002 22.

modest income; however, this did not have any negative impact on his life at that time. He lived in rural California's Salinas Valley near the Pacific Coast, an area that was great for farming. Concerning religious views, Steinbeck was Episcopalian, which had an enormous effect on his work later, for example, he connected religious views with themes and characters in his books. He was also fascinated with marine life since he was a child because he used to spend summers in the cottage of his family at Pacific Grove. Additionally, during his childhood, Steinbeck became fond of literature presumably thanks to his mother who had worked as a teacher.<sup>3</sup> His reading of the classical literary canon affected and inspired him greatly as Brian E. Railsback and Michael J. Meyer notes:

He comes to school already with a love for books, thanks to a household where books are important and his parents and older sisters read to him. This sets Steinbeck's lifelong love of reading: "I guess there are never enough books," he writes years later. As a child, he is introduced to the *Bible*, which will have a profound impact on his writing style. Other important works include *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the works of Romantic writers such as Walter Scott, the works of Shakespeare, and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The latter work will become an obsession in Steinbeck's last years, as he will strive unsuccessfully to the complete retelling of Arthurian Legends with *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*.<sup>4</sup>

This might have inspired his decision to become a writer at the young age of 14. Steinbeck's themes of hard work could have also been inspired by his father's occupation as a flour mill operator. Steinbeck worked manually during his early years of life because

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<sup>3</sup> Railsback, *Chronology*. xlix-lviii; Nakayama, "Fingers of Cloud: A Satire on College Protervity": A Meditative Reading 161-170

<sup>4</sup> Railsback, *Chronology*. xlix

of his surroundings. As Jackson J. Benson observes: ‘Where Steinbeck grew up is important as well, because much of his best work takes place in an enclosed valley, a microcosm in which fundamental human dramas work themselves out in death and life, violence and compassion.’<sup>5</sup> Steinbeck typically worked on various ranches and farms, such as at the Spreckels Sugar mill. These later provided the typical settings for his works and even a basis for his story ‘Of Mice and Men’ (1937) because of the dark side of humanity and the harsh realities of migrants’ lives, which he witnessed while he worked there. The setting of Steinbeck’s work is situated mostly in the Salinas Valley and the California Coast Ranges region, in central California. Examples are Salinas, San Joaquin Valley, and Monterey. Steinbeck spent his childhood and upbringing there, which had a lasting impact on his writing career in the form of his experiences with hard work and the difficult life of immigrants. In general, it created a strong connection to growing plants and the land, which led to his dependence on growing flowers and vegetables his whole life even during his living in New York no matter how hard it was. This is also the reason why scholars call this region “Steinbeck Country” because of Steinbeck’s detailed portrayal of this place, regional issues, and archetypal people living there with their mentalities and values that affect the way they think.<sup>6</sup>

After graduating from Salinas High School in 1919 Steinbeck enrolled at Stanford University to study English literature, however, he did not have much dedication and did not finish successfully. Then he shortly moved to New York in the early 1920s where he was trying to publish stories as a freelance writer. Apparently, this plan was not as successful as he expected – he was rejected and decided to go back in the late 1920s. Having returned to California he began to work odd jobs and then finally found an

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<sup>5</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xlii

<sup>6</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xli-xlvi

occupation there as a caretaker, which I believe might have affected the characters in ‘Of Mice and Man’.<sup>7</sup>

Later after his return, he also met his love and first wife Carol Henning at a fish hatchery. Before he married his first wife in January 1930, he published his first novel *Cup of Gold* in 1929. Carol Henning, alongside his father, gave Steinbeck great support in his writing, which resulted in his most productive period in the 1930s. During that time Steinbeck also formed a long-lasting close friendship with Edward Ricketts, the marine biologist, who had a great effect on Steinbeck’s philosophy and environmentalism and later inspired his portrayal of the character of the friend Ed in ‘Burning Bright’ (1950). Contrary to the previous achievement of publishing his first book, Steinbeck and his wife lived in financially difficult conditions alternately in San Francisco, in Eagle Rock, and the holiday home of Steinbeck’s parents in Pacific Grove. Additionally, in these years Steinbeck had started to try out new genres for his books - the first experiment, a play-novelle (a novella that can be transformed into a play) ‘Of Mice and Men’ was a commercial success. It was published in 1937, adapted to a theatre play by George Simon Kaufman in the same year, and later even made into a film. In 1940 Steinbeck won The Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*. To add to this, Steinbeck and his friend Ricketts traveled to Mexico together to examine marine life in the same year. Their collaboration later resulted in another work called *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951). Contrary to the happiness from previous success, in 1943 Carol and Steinbeck divorced after going through lots of difficulties and various love affairs. Their problems included having different perspectives on the aspect of Steinbeck being famous, for example, modest Steinbeck wanted to keep his privacy, while Carol did not agree.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after, in the

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<sup>7</sup> Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: a Biography*. H. Holt, 1996.; Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xli-xlvi

<sup>8</sup> Railsback, Chronology. xlix-lviii

same year, Steinbeck married his second wife Gwyndolyn Conger, with whom he had a love affair during the first marriage. Even though they had two sons together, Thomas and John, they still traveled a lot. In mid-1940s Steinbeck finally left California for good to escape from the popularity of this place. As Thomas Fensch writes: ‘There are few existing interviews of Steinbeck during his California years. This is not surprising, considering the ordeal of publicity and vilification he endured during those years. He was shocked at the reception of his books, especially in California.’<sup>9</sup> Steinbeck left to stay a private man and to avoid the hatred that he experienced from local people who were controversially portrayed in his novels.<sup>10</sup>

In 1948 Steinbeck experienced a period of depression due to Edward Ricketts’ abrupt death and the end of his second marriage after five years. According to Brian E. Railsback and Michael J. Meyer, he made a radical turn in his writing because of the horrifying experience of the Second World War, leaving his favorite so-called “Steinbeck Country” and the death of Ed Ricketts. Moreover, Steinbeck was most hurt by the betrayal of his second wife, who declared that she had never loved him and claimed that her infidelity had resulted in the birth of their second son. This second period of his writing career was not as successful as the previous one, even though he tried hard to earn recognition once again.<sup>11</sup> I believe that his distinctive style of writing disappeared with no more regional themes and bold language that made these realistic books so popular. In 1950 Steinbeck’s third play-novelette ‘Burning Bright’ was published, but it apparently was not as successful as ‘Of Mice and Men’ with Steinbeck’s reasoning that it could not

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas, Fensch. “Introduction.” *Conversations with John Steinbeck*, edited by Thomas Fensch, by John Steinbeck, University Press of Mississippi, 1988, x

<sup>10</sup> Fensch, Introduction. xiii

<sup>11</sup> Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xlvi

be transformed well into a play. According to Thomas Fensch 'Burning Bright' was Steinbeck's worst critical and commercial failure.<sup>12</sup>

Two years after the last divorce, Steinbeck married his last wife Elaine Scott in 1950. He spent a pleasant time with her in a cottage at Somerset unsuccessfully trying to write a book about his fondness for Arthurian legends and in general to be more productive. In 1962, to his surprise, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but on the other hand critics, such as Arthur Mizener, expressed strong discontent with the committee's decision and Steinbeck sorrowfully agreed with them. Critics disagreed because they felt that the other artists were more deserving, and that Steinbeck no longer had the signature style that he used to have when writing his masterpieces. Steinbeck was fully aware of this, insufficiently trying his best to change it.<sup>12</sup>

It is fundamental to note that Steinbeck was not only a writer of the classical literary canon of American literature but also an important political figure after his most productive years as a writer. Being a political figure made a permanent mark on his personal life and the assessment of his figure as an icon. To begin with, he was a famous, talented, and very patriotic writer at that time, so it was easy to become a political figure as well. His acquaintances with authors and journalists probably influenced his leftist political views and opinions, which began to slightly change later. After being a political advisor and a close friend of Adlai Ewing Stevenson, then a cultural ambassador to Russia for a year during the presidential term of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Steinbeck finally offered his skills and had served as a speechwriter for Lyndon B. Johnson (the President of the United States of America between 1963 and 1969) in his last years. Steinbeck's assignment from Johnson was to improve rhetorically and technically the President's

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<sup>12</sup> Railsback, Chronology. xlix-lviii

communication with the public to be more effective, so he could for example persuade people to vote for him during the Presidential campaign in the 1960s. Steinbeck also provided his writing skills to make Johnson's speeches sound more public-friendly during his presidential term. The connection with Johnson had a great influence on Steinbeck's later writing and views, such as his agreement with Johnson's policies on the Vietnam War. On the other hand, his family and friends did not approve of this political change, and it even caused a strong disagreement between John Steinbeck and his son.<sup>13</sup> Despite his controversial last years, Elaine and Steinbeck were happily married for 18 years until he died at the age of 66 on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1968 of congestive heart failure after various physical problems stemming from his heart disease leaving his wife to publish his final (mostly autobiographical) works posthumously.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 The Works of John Steinbeck

I believe that the writing career of John Steinbeck was not only a fundamental part of the American classical literary canon but also an intriguing masterpiece of someone who had remained brutally honest in his work even if it brought problems and controversy into his personal life and it hurt his commercial success. As Railsback comments: 'Few American writers have been the source of as much controversy as John Steinbeck. The furor over *The Grapes of Wrath* lasted for almost two years, as the author was denounced in newspaper editorials and the Congress as a liar and a pervert.'<sup>15</sup> Steinbeck's books, *The Grapes of Wrath* and 'Of Mice and Men', were banned for using offensive language in many countries, the United States of America included. He is generally one of the most frequently banned authors of our modern era and this might be another reason why he

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<sup>13</sup> Hayashi, John Steinbeck as Lyndon B. Johnson's Speech Writer 105-118; Fensch, Introduction. xv

<sup>14</sup> Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: a Biography*. H. Holt, 1996.; Benson, Jackson J. *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck*. New York: Viking Press, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xlvii

was so often questioned by critics as a writer.<sup>16</sup> Even though he was subjected to an immense amount of controversy and criticism he is still the author of 33 books, including one co-authored with his close friend Edward Ricketts. He wrote mostly novels, novellas, non-fiction books, and short stories, with *The Grapes of Wrath*, 'Of Mice and Men', and *East of Eden* (1952) considered his masterpieces.<sup>17</sup>

It was typical for Steinbeck to be always experimenting with forms, methods, and themes in his books. He tried to add something new and interesting to every work. Another distinct feature of Steinbeck's writing style is layers of meaning that go beyond the words in his novels. His style was documentary and realistic, mostly written in the third person omniscient narration. I believe that the most crucial feature of his style is using characterization and vivid environmental descriptions. He writes so that the reader feels real emotions toward the characters. For example, the reader pities Joe Saul for not being the biological father of his newborn child in 'Burning Bright' and they sympathize with George Milton's struggles with Lennie Small in 'Of Mice and Men'. Other features are his symbolic characters, myths, and method of foreshadowing (use of an event to hint at another that is coming later).<sup>18</sup> Steinbeck's style was also often compared to Hemingway's style because Steinbeck was stylistically inspired by Hemingway. However, Steinbeck was more lyrical and emotional. He was sort of romantic, but also intellectual in his work so that it created a complex writing style.<sup>19</sup> Among his sources of inspiration, Steinbeck was generally fascinated by British writers. He was particularly fond of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur: Book of King Arthur and of His Noble*

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<sup>16</sup> Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xlvii

<sup>17</sup> George, Stephen K. *John Steinbeck: a Centennial Tribute*. Praeger, 2002.; Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: a Biography*. H. Holt, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Lisca, Peter. *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*. Gordian Press, 1981.; Fensch, Introduction. xiii

<sup>19</sup> Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xlv-xlv



*Knights of the Round Table* (1485), which led to Steinbeck's attempt to write a book related to the Arthurian legends.<sup>20</sup>

Another part of Steinbeck's literary career is also his journalist writing. In general, Steinbeck emerges as Mr. American Spectator because of his love for Joseph Addison. Steinbeck was perceived as the American equivalent of Addison's Mr. Spectator in the United Kingdom. Particularly, Steinbeck imitates Addison and they both share the same important function of the social critic. His journalistic career is characterized by his curiosity that situated events in their immediate environment, getting straight to facts, and suggesting his point of view while remaining an objective journalist able to picture events as they happened without bias. These are features that he implemented into his writing in general and are included even in his books.<sup>21</sup> As Robert J. DeMott comments:

Steinbeck's prevalent reputation as the impersonal, objective reporter of striking farm workers and dispossessed migrants or as escapist popularizer of primitive views has obscured the roots of his intellectual background, literary interests, and artistic methods. He was an author who read to write and who frequently depended on various kinds of documents to supply, augment, or temper his apprehension of reality...The world of books provided Steinbeck with imaginative enrichment, intellectual sustenance, and practical resources.<sup>22</sup>

I believe that this is a fundamental part of his success in the literary canon.

Concerning the themes of Steinbeck's books, he wrote mostly fiction about his specific region as previously noted. This area that he had described in his books was later

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<sup>20</sup> Timmerman, Charley, America, and Malory: John Steinbeck's Later Ethics 37-50

<sup>21</sup> Heavilin, "Only through Imitation Do We Develop towards Originality": Reflections of Addison's *Spectator* in Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* 23-35

<sup>22</sup> DeMott, Robert J. *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed*. Garland, 1984, xix.

known as “Steinbeck Country”. Steinbeck’s novels with the regionalistic color that depict this region are known as “California novels”, such as ‘Of Mice and Men’ or *East of Eden*.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the setting is connected with archetypal characters and the ethical values of the people living there as Li points out:

Indeed, Steinbeck has exposed many cultural values which often contradict conventional beliefs – for example, those on society, government, religion, and human beings’ relationship to nature. Steinbeck has intentionally created characters who fight against nature and struggle with themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Steinbeck generally excelled in writing about people’s self-realization in front of nature, survival circumstances, or the important role of people from various ethical stances. These regional-cultural aspects are fully portrayed in Steinbeck’s books with complete honesty. Steinbeck intended to be so authentic, for example by using colloquial and vulgar language, that he later had to deal with censorship and banning of his books. ‘Of Mice and Men’ is a case in point.<sup>25</sup>

This setting is inherently linked with American characters; therefore, the American mental image and ideals are linked, too. These are connected because people of various regions have different thinking about what they perceive as normal to do or possess according to how they idealize the place. In his books, the American ideal is described as civilizing the country and humanizing the land. California is portrayed as a land that is promising for people who struggle there. However, it is not the promised land. It is more of a wasteland that has nothing to provide in return for people’s dedication and

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<sup>23</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xlii-xliii; Thomas, Fensch. “Introduction.” *Conversations with John Steinbeck*, edited by Thomas Fensch, by John Steinbeck, University Press of Mississippi, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Li, *John Steinbeck’s Cultural Frontiers* 122

<sup>25</sup> Nakayama, “Fingers of Cloud: A Satire on College Protervity”: A Meditative Reading 169-170

hard work. This depicts the conflict between nature and the people living there. In addition, Steinbeck writes about capitalism that relates to the American ideal of having a substantial amount of money and possessions, which is to be developed in the next paragraph. I believe that it is an important theme in his books because he experienced being poor in the United States of America, the land that promised a lot, including becoming rich or making dreams come true.<sup>26</sup>

Steinbeck also used familiar subjects directly from his experiences and memories. Later in his lifetime, he wrote about contemporary events and issues that he had experienced as a reporter. It was typical for Steinbeck to use themes of social and economic issues of common working-class people, farmworkers, and migrant workers in combination with themes of fate and injustice. An example is writing about people living during the Great Depression, which is a common setting for most of his work and has a great effect on the characters' motivations in the books. After the rapid change in his work, Steinbeck explored many other themes that he was interested in, such as marine biology, religion, and politics.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, the idea of perception and insight is fundamental in Steinbeck's books. His protagonists are protagonists not because of their actions, but because of their broad vision and being insightful.<sup>28</sup> Even Steinbeck's child characters are perceived as intriguing and convincing because they are not all the same. They have different attitudes and characteristics as full characters.<sup>29</sup> In general, many of Steinbeck's characters are recurring and appear in several of his books, for example, the characters of Alice, Doc,

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<sup>26</sup> Tanner, Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent* and the American Ideal 85-96

<sup>27</sup> Meyer, *It's All in Your Head: Transforming Heavenly and Hellish Settings in Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven** 133-150; Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: a Biography*. H. Holt, 1996.; Railsback, *Chronology*. xlix-lviii

<sup>28</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xliv-xlv

<sup>29</sup> Gladstein, *Through the Eyes of a Child: A Steinbeck Forte* 53-67

Doctor, Eddie, and George. It is a question of whether those names are just a coincidence or a sophisticated plan. In general, Steinbeck created a feeling that everyone is part of the larger whole like farmers and immigrants are part of the farm. They might not have good relationships. There is often a conflict between different ethical groups. Naturalistically, they cannot leave various past influences behind even if they try to. For example, Lennie Small from 'Of Mice and Men' or Joe Saul from 'Burning Bright' cannot change their biological features because they were born this way. Lennie Small cannot change his mental capacity and Joe Saul cannot become fertile. However, they work together and so they create an important system as a whole. Additionally, Steinbeck often plays with metaphors, in which the external feature is a metaphor for that which is on the inner side of a character. If a character cares about their appearance, then they care about their inner qualities as well.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning religiosity, Steinbeck similarly to other American writers got inspired by the Bible. The legacy of biblical Protestantism is a crucial part of his stories. His major novels contain characters that are based on the biblical protagonists including Jesus, Moses, Mary, Cain and Abel, Paul, and others. He employs settings from the Bible, such as the desert, the heavens, or pastures. Steinbeck also writes about similar situations, such as wandering people or a son that returns to his father, and much more.<sup>31</sup>

As previously mentioned, Steinbeck's friend Ed Ricketts had not only an important influence on Steinbeck's themes, but he also served as an inspiration for his characters. The biologist Ricketts formed a connection with Steinbeck, and this affected Steinbeck in changing his worldview. He began to be aware of the importance of nature and environmentalism. Steinbeck started to explore the theme of nature as a fundamental

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<sup>30</sup> Heavilin, Barbara A., and Stephen K. George. *A John Steinbeck Reader Essays in Honor of Stephen K. George*. Scarecrow Press, 2009.; Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xli-xlvii

<sup>31</sup> McEntyre, Bible, The. 28-29

system on which people depend, the sensuousness of people, and their emotions. He believed that humans besides being cultural, economic, or political animals, are also a biological species that is not detached from nature. They are a part of the whole nature. However, he does not see people as some superior species or low species.<sup>32</sup> Steinbeck refers to this when he asks: ‘Why do we dread to think of ourselves as a species? Can it be that we are afraid of what we may find? That human self-love would suffer too much and that the image of God might prove to be a mask?’<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Ricketts served as an inspiration particularly for the recurring character Ed. Ed is a model for his so-called “self-characters”. “Self-characters” function as spokesmen of the author and they share his opinions. This character appears for example in ‘Burning Bright’.<sup>34</sup>

Concerning ethics, Steinbeck is not concluding what is moral and what is immoral, he improves and enlarges the visions of the reader to understand new perspectives. He employs the non-teleological philosophy developed in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. It is a method to examine the world that gives focus to what it is rather than what it could be or should be. It attempts to answer mostly “how” or “what” than questioning “why”.<sup>35</sup> As Etheridge notes:

According to Steinbeck and Ricketts, the problem with conventional teleologies is that they seek to assign blame for the troubles of the world to some party or cause rather than to accept the world as it is. Unemployment during the Depression era is one of the major illustrative examples used in *Cortez*. Many lamented that “the country had to support” the unemployed “because they were shiftless and

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<sup>32</sup> Li, John Steinbeck’s Cultural Frontiers 121-132; Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xli-xlvi

<sup>33</sup> Steinbeck, John. *Log from the "Sea of Cortez": Narrative Portion of the "Sea of Cortez"*, by John Steinbeck, Mandarin, 1995, 314.

<sup>34</sup> Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xlv

<sup>35</sup> Etheridge, Non-teleological Thinking. 250-251

negligent.” The difficulty with the teleological perspective—blaming the unemployment rate on workers’ laziness—is that it ignores the fact that “at that time there was work for only about seventy percent of the total employable population.” The nonteleological perspective assigns “no blame, at least no social fault . . . to these people; they are what they are ‘because’ natural conditions are what they are.”<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Steinbeck does not divide his characters or even events into good or bad. No values can exist without the opposite side, for example, the good cannot exist without the bad. Steinbeck had a world view that is not the classical ethics of what is perceived as immoral and moral, or Christian ethics. He was agreeing with the Taoist and Shintoist reverence for nature. This harmony is for example described at the end of ‘Burning Bright’ when Joe Saul learns that a man is the father of all children, and he realizes that the child must be of his own blood even if he is not the biological father.<sup>37</sup> I believe that this harmony is also used throughout and mostly at the end of ‘Of Mice and Men’ when George Milton makes his decision to kill Lennie to “help” his friend to escape the worst.

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<sup>36</sup> Etheridge, *Non-teleological Thinking*. 250-251

<sup>37</sup> Li, *John Steinbeck’s Cultural Frontiers* 127-132; Etheridge, *Non-teleological Thinking*. 250-251

## 2 ‘Of Mice and Men’ and ‘Burning Bright’

‘Of Mice and Men’ is a play-novelette by Steinbeck published in January 1937. It was originally named simply ‘Something That Happened’, which might express the non-theological philosophy and biological determinism. Events would start right from the title of the work. Even though Steinbeck decided to change the name of his work to something more complex and probably more commercial. The book has become a bestseller and a part of the American literary canon read not only by scholars but by different groups. It was a book that people could relate to because of the realistic storytelling with the local setting and the authenticity in general. I believe that this is the most profound reason why people read it to this day even if it was a banned book that raised a lot of controversy from the start. The immense success had led to the transformation of the book into a play and three films.<sup>38</sup>

‘Burning Bright’, originally titled ‘In the Forest of the Night’, was published and then performed as a Broadway play in October 1950 as a modern allegorical play-novelette. Later in 1959, it had its premiere as an adaptation for television. Critics were not satisfied with Steinbeck’s third play-novelette from the beginning. ‘Burning Bright’ was not a work of the continuing line of Steinbeck’s success. After hearing this Steinbeck was initially enraged. However, he eventually admitted that it did not successfully work as a play and started to work on something new.<sup>39</sup> As Jackson J. Benson writes:

Burning Bright, produced as a book and Broadway play in October, is reviewed as a courageous but failed experiment. After initial rage at the critics’ inability to

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<sup>38</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xliii; Railsback, *Of Mice and Men (Film and Television Versions)*. 257-258; Li, *Of Mice and Men (Book)*. 254-257; Waldron, Carmel, and Peter Buckroyd. *Oxford Literature Companions: Of Mice and Men*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. lv; Nakayama, Kiyoshi. “Novella into Play: Burning Bright.” *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck*, by Susan Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle, University Of Alabama Press, 2016, 151–161.

understand what he was doing with his highly abstract morality tale, he later admits that it did not work well as a play. He quickly moves on to work on *East of Eden*.<sup>40</sup>

The work is very abstract, and its failure is obvious for many reasons, such as the ability to perform the feelings of pregnant woman and her womb or the use of too universalized unnatural language in the play in a theater.<sup>41</sup> In this chapter will be compared both works, including the brief mention of their plots, structure, and themes, which is further to be developed.

The story of ‘*Of Mice and Men*’ is simple yet touching at the same time. The book is based on an event that Steinbeck witnessed, even though he presents it objectively as the narrator. As Benson notes: ‘*Of Mice and Men* was based on an incident that he witnessed in his early twenties, when a large, mentally retarded worker turned with a pitchfork on a straw boss who had been heckling him.’<sup>42</sup> Steinbeck also wrote this book based on the real people that he met during his life, the *New York World Telegram* comments on this:

Mr. Steinbeck says that all the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, *Tortilla Flat* and other books have been people he has known. Occasionally one of his characters will be a composite of two personalities. As for the two principal characters in *Of Mice and Men* they were portrayed as they actually exist in California.<sup>43</sup>

This is Steinbeck’s view on this. However, it is a matter questions how reliable his words are.

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<sup>40</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. lv

<sup>41</sup> Railsback, *Chronology*. lv; Railsback, *Burning Bright*. 41-43; Railsback, “Critics, Critics Burning Bright”. 67

<sup>42</sup> Benson, *An Introduction to John Steinbeck*. xliii

<sup>43</sup> *New York World Telegram*, *More a Mouse Than a Man, Steinbeck Faces Reporters* 6



In his work, Steinbeck explores the themes of companionship and the fragile nature of human dreams that can break into pieces easily. The plot is situated on the farms and the wild landscape of California during the hard times of The Great Depression (1929-1939). George Milton and Lennie Small are friends and migrant workers that try to earn a sufficient amount of money to make their American dream come true. For them, this means sharing an acre of land in form of a small farm with rabbits. I believe that this is an allusion to the garden of Eden in the form of ultimate happiness, companionship, and the independence from being migrant workers that they are hoping to achieve one day. There is not an equal friendship between George and Lennie. George is more of a caring figure for faithful Lennie, who is mentally disabled with no family. The mental disability causes Lennie a lot of problems in his life. He likes to pet soft things, but he kills them, and it creates problems for George and Lennie.<sup>44</sup> Running from another ranch and the last trouble, the two find a farm to work on, but they need to be careful. They are experiencing the usual life on the farm with other workers including chores and pastimes, such as playing cards. However, Lennie's mental disability leads them into trouble once again, he murders a woman by accident. The outcome of this is a search party led by the enraged husband that is chasing Lennie. George knows exactly where Lennie is because they agreed to be in a specific place in case something like this happens. In the final tragedy, George shoots Lennie dead out of pity because he does not want him to be tortured.<sup>45</sup>

The plot of 'Burning Bright' is simple and short. It has four different scenes – at the circus, in a farm kitchen, at sea, and finally at the hospital. In the circus, Joe Saul and

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<sup>44</sup> Steinbeck, John. "Of Mice and Men." *John Steinbeck – Novels and Stories, 1932-1937*, by John Steinbeck, Library of America, 1994, 803-806

<sup>45</sup> Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men. 797-878; Li, Of Mice and Men (Book). 254-257; "The 1980's." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*, by Michael J. Meyer, Scarecrow Press, 2009, 96; Emery, Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men 129-131; Benson, An Introduction to John Steinbeck. xliii; Li, Candy. 47

Friend Ed discuss Joe's depression. Joe struggles because he still has no successor to his line. Friend Ed is not the only one who listens, Joe's wife Mordeen cares as well. Joe's problematic work partner Victor confesses his love for Mordeen. She rejects him, and Joe returns and orders him to leave. Mordeen talks with Ed, and she comes up with a plan of secretly conceiving a child with another man. Later she uses Victor as a kind of stud animal. The second scene is on a farm. After a few morning sicknesses, Mordeen announces her pregnancy. Joe and Ed are delighted, but jealous Victor creates tension. Victor is ordered to take care of her, and he becomes angry. Mordeen advises him to leave, and she states that the child is Joe's acting as if nothing has ever happened between them. The third scene is at the sea. Mordeen is about to deliver the baby. Victor unsuccessfully tries to force her to leave Joe. Scared Mordeen tries to kill him, Friend Ed eventually pitches him over the side of the ship. Suspicious Joe learns the fact that he is sterile and is in rage. The birth of the child in a hospital interrupts this. Finally, Joe accepts the truth after a discussion with Friend Ed, he loves the newborn child as his own with the new enlightenment.<sup>46</sup>

I believe that Steinbeck's works 'Burning Bright' and 'Of Mice and Men' have some things in common even if that does not seem so from the critical reception. Both these works were produced by Steinbeck as an experiment of a genre called a play-novelette with 'Of Mice and Men' as the first play-novelette (1937) and 'Burning Bright' as the third and last play-novelette (1950). The term play-novelette means that these novellas can be easily transformed into theatrical plays and then performed on a stage.<sup>47</sup> On one hand 'Of Mice and Men' was an incredible success as an outcome of an experiment and it was praised to such an extent that it has become the part of the American

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<sup>46</sup> Steinbeck, John. *Burning Bright*. Penguin Group, 1986; Railsback, Victor. 407-408; Railsback, Burning Bright. 41-43; Railsback, Saul, Joe. 332

<sup>47</sup> Railsback, Chronology. lii

literary canon, on the other hand 'Burning Bright' was claimed as Steinbeck's failure with the criticism pointing out that the choice of the genre was wrong for this story. This explanation makes sense because these two books vary a lot in the way they are written. There is for example a crucial difference between the complexity of the portrayal of characters in 'Of Mice and Men' and the simplicity of characterization in 'Burning Bright'. Another thing worth pointing out is the different use of language in the two books. 'Of Mice and Men' has become a controversial work because Steinbeck used authentic speech for the migrant workers, while 'Burning Bright' has a simple and standard speech that seems almost unnatural at times.<sup>48</sup> This brief look at the books may lead to the conclusion that there are too many differences between the two novellas to compare them, but I argue that the striking success and the complete failure on the other side are only the consequence of the authenticity of characters in the books and how much people can relate to them. There is a different historical background. 'Of Mice and Men' was written in the 1930s and referred to a certain era in history that people went through and understood when the book was published. The language of the books also was authentic, and it was easy to read it for everyone. 'Burning Bright' was published in 1950. It was written two years after Steinbeck's depression period and this might have left a mark on the content of this book. He switched his focus to events that were only his own, it was no longer a specific era in history. For example, there is a noticeable parallel between the fact that his divorced wife claimed that Steinbeck is not the biological father of their son and Joe Saul going through the situation of having a son that is not of his own blood.<sup>49</sup> All in all, it is a matter for debate what a better approach to writing a bestseller is. The authenticity plays a significant role in success, but I believe that there are more

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<sup>48</sup> Railsback, Chronology. lii; Li, *Of Mice and Men* (Book). 254-257; Loftis, A Historical Introduction to *Of Mice and Men* 115-124; Railsback, Chronology. lv; Railsback, *Burning Bright*. 41-43

<sup>49</sup> Railsback, Chronology. il-lviii

important aspects, which are to be further discussed. Despite this fact, I am sure that Steinbeck's protagonists in these works – George Milton from 'Of Mice and Men' and Mordeen Saul from 'Burning Bright' have a lot in common even if the books are total opposites in many aspects.

It is important therefore to point out are things that both books have in common. Starting from the title, both books had originally different titles. However, what is peculiar about these works is the symbolism of the titles that they have now. On one side, 'Of Mice and Men' refers to Lennie and his habit of touching soft furry things. He likes petting mice, but he eventually kills them by stroking them too hard. It establishes the tragedy of the story, which is centered on Lennie's mental disability. By this, it also foreshadowed by the final murder of Curley's wife and then Lennie. The title also refers to the part of a poem by Robert Burns, where he emphasizes the idea of the futility of human efforts and the vanity of our wishes.<sup>50</sup> As William Goldhurst observes:

“The best laid schemes o' mice and men / Gang aft a-gley / An' lea' us nought but grief an' pain / For promised joy.” This notion is obviously of major importance in the novella, and it may be said to be Steinbeck's main theme on the surface level of action and development of character.<sup>50</sup>

'Burning Bright' has a similarly symbolic title. Firstly, it also refers to the part of another poem, 'The Tiger' by William Blake. It shares interesting similarities with the poem, such as play with light and auras of danger. Particularly, while the poem alludes to the dangers of such horrific creatures as a tiger, 'Burning Bright' is about the dangerous

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<sup>50</sup> Goldhurst, John Steinbeck's Parable of the Curse of Cain 51

situation of giving a husband a non-biological child and raising it with him.<sup>51</sup> As Steinbeck wrote:

Mordeen said, "It is very dark. Turn up the light. Let me have light. I cannot see your face."

"Light," he said. "You want light? I will give you light." He tore the mask from his face, and his face was shining and his eyes were shining. "<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, in my opinion, it refers to the abrupt light that is mentioned in the climax of the work at the hospital and which may refer to being born into the new world or the light of the accepting of truth, which can be hard.

Another thing to note is the structure of the work. There are more points to elaborate on concerning both books as play-novelettes (as previously noted). According to Paul McCarthy Steinbeck employs in 'Of Mice and Men' the three Greek unities – time, place, and action – as he used simple action and eliminated the complex settings that could be problematic for performing a play-novelette. He does not use it in the complete sense, I believe it would not work for the book. The action of 'Of Mice and Men' lasts three days in the Salinas Valley in California. The story has two main protagonists, George and Lennie. Generally, the number of characters is limited to the residents of a small farm.<sup>53</sup> I believe that the Greek unities cannot be employed in 'Burning Bright'. The main reason is that Steinbeck could not use the unity of time. It is not clearly stated how long it takes from the beginning to the end of the work. However, the story covers possibly some time before and the whole pregnancy of Mordeen, which alone takes at least nine months. The unity of place is not employed as the play-novelette

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<sup>51</sup> Railsback; Blake, William. 30

<sup>52</sup> Steinbeck, Burning Bright 93

<sup>53</sup> Li, Of Mice and Men (Book). 254; Spilka, Of George and Lennie and Curley's Wife: Sweet Violence in Steinbeck's Eden 67

has four acts with different settings, for example at the sea or the hospital. The only unity which is used in some sense is the unity of characters. Similarly to 'Of Mice and Men', Steinbeck employs only a few characters with two main protagonists, Joe and Mordeen. (Friend Ed might also be perceived as an influential figure, however, he does not contribute to action that much.) To add to this, in my opinion, the massive differences are in the structure and chosen genre. As previously mentioned, play-novelettes are intended to be used for acting on stage and the author must consider all technical factors, such as producing the book that can actors and theatre transform into a play. While 'Of Mice and Men' with its dialogues and very direct action can be transformed to stage quite easily, 'Burning Bright' cannot for a number of reasons. In 'Burning Bright' there are various events that are hard to portray on stage, such as Mordeen's feeling during her pregnancy or the complex emotions of accepting a non-biological child as his own and dealing with infidelity in marriage. This work would have way fewer pages if adapted for the stage.<sup>54</sup> It is a matter of debate, but I believe that this is the most important reason for the success of one work and the failure of another.

Lastly, the content is notable for both books. The plot obviously differs, but the themes that are explored in the works may be quite similar. In both books the theme of violence as an element in one's life occurs. In 'Of Mice and Men' there are various examples of this. The murder of Lennie is the most important event, it seems inevitable based on the Lennie's repeated acts of killing. George tells him that his American dream will soon come true:

The voices came close now. George raised the gun and listened to the voices.

Lennie begged, "Le's do it now. Le's get that place now."

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<sup>54</sup> Meyer, *The 1980s* 95-96; Nakayama, "Novella into Play: *Burning Bright*." 151-161.

"Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta."

And George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger.<sup>55</sup>

The moment of killing Lennie is sudden and it breaks the calming atmosphere that George created. In 'Burning Bright' violence also plays a role. For example, the murder of Victor changes the future for the fragile pregnant Mordeen, who tries to stab him to get rid of him.<sup>56</sup> The whole situation in the book seems almost tranquil:

She sighed deeply. "Don't you know I will kill you, Victor?"

"Hurry," he said. "Only a coat. I don't want anything more from this old life."

She looked at him quietly, and her eyes set with resolve. She moved to the rack of coats and lifted down a long gray cloak.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the whole situation escalates, and Friend Ed kills Victor by throwing him off board without a hesitation:

"I have my sailing orders," he said. "I sail at midnight. I came to say good-by."

He looked at Victor. "Will you come on deck with me?" he asked. "I have a message for you."

"Say it here," Victor said harshly.

"No, it's a secret. Come!" He gently urged Victor through the door, and the two disappeared into the night.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 877

<sup>56</sup> Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, Excerpt from Chapter 5 83

<sup>57</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 78-79

<sup>58</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 80

The murder of Victor is another inevitable event as he would never accept Mordeen raising his child with Joe. In my opinion, in both works no one questions the choice of violence against the peace, it is almost natural for them to handle things only violently by attacking or even killing people. They simply accept murder as the only solution to the complications. They do not hesitate; they are aware of their actions and are also doing them with the view of making their lives simpler. Without Lennie there are no worries for George about him, without Victor Mordeen does not have to worry about him complicating their marriage with Joe. Additionally, George's killing of Lennie is often interpreted as an act of mercy. It is even possible to say that in this sense killing means freeing oneself from problems. However, both acts are still murders and therefore can never be glorified.<sup>59</sup> Alongside such violence Steinbeck explores other taboo themes, such as sexuality. In 'Of Mice and Men' the promiscuity of Curley's wife is very often discussed in connection with frequent sexual innuendo:

"I never meant no harm, George. Honest I never."

"Well, you keep away from her, 'cause she's a rattrap if I ever seen one. You let Curley take the rap. He let himself in for it. Glove fulla vaseline," George said disgustedly. "An' I bet he's eatin' raw eggs and writin' to the patent medicine houses."<sup>60</sup>

Curley's relationship with his wife might be a bit complicated. However, some point out that Steinbeck breaks another taboo just by putting Lennie and George into this firm companionship that may be questioned as a homosexual bond. Various critics, such as Mark Spilka, Jean Emery, or Leland S. Person, support the view of that the gender roles that George is positioned as a wife and Lennie as a husband. This is the basis for other

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<sup>59</sup> Spilka, *Of George and Lennie and Curley's Wife: Sweet Violence in Steinbeck's Eden* 62-72

<sup>60</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 820



scholars to question it further. This is further to be discussed and explained in comparison to the inner characteristics of George and Mordeen in the last chapter.<sup>61</sup> All in all, this interpretation would be very controversial from the historical point of view, but it is a matter of a question. To compare it, I believe that in 'Burning Bright' there is one very big taboo concerning the historical perspective and the role of a woman in the period. Mordeen Saul seems like a subordinated woman who is obedient to her husband. However, she chooses to reject this status of "a good wife" through her infidelity towards her husband and by using another man as a stud animal. She has extra-marital sex, which was (and even in some cultures still is) perceived as immoral. Then she prepares to raise husband's non-biological child with him as a kind of fraud. It might sound misogynistic and not that controversial today, but I am sure that in the middle of the previous century it was a very problematic and scandalous situation for a woman, even if it is not discussed directly in the work. In my opinion, in both books are themes that may have raised controversy and therefore drew the attention of the public eye.

To conclude, the comparison between 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Burning Bright' creates an important basis and introduction for the analysis of the characters of George Milton and Mordeen Saul. It established various similarities, such as the genre of play-novelette, the change of title or the story's relation to Steinbeck's life, and choice of themes. Extreme differences in critical receptions are an interesting fact to keep in mind when we point out how similar George and Mordeen are. This shows that Steinbeck was persistent in his writings and that there is a place for comparison, which is to be developed further.

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<sup>61</sup> Meyer, *The 1990s* 111-113; Spilka, *Of George and Lennie and Curley's Wife: Sweet Violence in Steinbeck's Eden* 66-67

### **3 Comparison of George Milton and Mordeen Saul**

#### **3.1 The Outer Characteristics of George Milton and Mordeen Saul**

The outer characteristics is the first thing we can compare. We cannot assume many similarities as the inner side of a character is what matters more. We need to state the obvious, by comparing the appearance of two characters of different sexes we need to take this fact into account. They cannot look completely identical based on the that George is a man and Mordeen is a woman, it is the first basic distinction. However, I believe that they share various interesting, complex underlying similarities and contrasts that are worth discussing and are the starting point for the comparison of their personal traits. In brief, we cannot compare two characters without commenting on their appearances because how they look is often related to who they are.

George Milton from 'Of Mice and Men' is a migrant worker from the lower class. He also speaks non-standard English. As a migrant worker, he has strong hands and wears a worn-out denim, resistant clothes. He may often wear his black hat to protect him from the sun during his hard work. He is a bit older than Lennie. He is small, quick, and with a dark face and slender arms. These features are in sharp contrast to Lennie's appearance. George seems like a little dark entity compared to his enormous fair friend. Not only is George quick, but he also has small restless eyes and strong features, such as his thin nose with the protruding nasal bone.<sup>62</sup> As Steinbeck writes:

Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and

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<sup>62</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 797-799; Li, *Of Mice and Men (Book)*. 254-257; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202; Railsback, *Milton, George* 232

sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely.<sup>63</sup>

Additionally, both George and Lennie are somehow connected with the mice from the title of the book. George's physical features recall the appearance of a mouse. Lennie's connection is more direct, with him carrying mice for petting in his pocket.<sup>64</sup>

Mordeen Saul from 'Burning Bright' is a part of Joe's circus and his wife. As a circus star, she wears a lot of bold, shiny, extravagant clothes as is usual for this type of occupation. She is many years younger than her husband, to whom she has been married for three years at the beginning of the play-novelette. This contrasts them. She is considered very beautiful by society as she has a radiant smile and precise make-up all the time. Not only her husband loves her, but also Victor loves her without any encouragement from her side. She is a fair type with short blonde, almost golden, hair in tight curls. She has blue eyes.<sup>65</sup> As Steinbeck describes:

Now the flap lifted and Mordeen came in. Her tights were white and silver and over her shoulders she wore a long silver and blue cape which fell in heavy folds to her ankles. Mordeen was fair and very beautiful, her golden hair in short tight curls, her eyes blued, her make-up carefully applied. She was smiling, her face alight with a pleasant memory.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 797-798

<sup>64</sup> Hadella, *Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* 140

<sup>65</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 11; see also Railsback, *Mordeen*. 239-240

<sup>66</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 11

I believe that Mordeen is in contrast with her husband with regards to their age gap. However, because of the lack of Joe's characterization, we do not know exactly how much it affects his look and his inner characteristics. Mordeen's smile may be a reference to the title of the book. Unfortunately, except for these facts, Mordeen's outer characterization is very poor.

To conclude, whereas George is a migrant worker, Mordeen is a part of a circus. Their clothes are related to their occupation, they both wear the type of clothes useful for their jobs. George wears sturdy denim clothes and a black hat, which are practical for his hard work. While Mordeen wears extravagant bold clothes that are practical for her to attract attention in the circus. Mordeen is a fair type, interestingly in contrast is George's darkness. On one side, George's personality is emphasized by his "practical features". To explain it, he is small and quick with restless eyes, which may relate to his active lifestyle. On the other side, Mordeen's physical appearance emphasizes her "beauty features", such as her hair or make-up. This may be useful for her in her life. Both characters have a focus on certain features that play role in their lives. They also have their companions, Mordeen has Joe and George has Lennie. There is a contrast between both couples, George and Lennie and Joe and Mordeen. Between George and Lennie there is a strong contrast that starts with their appearances. Between Joe and Mordeen there is a contrast in the form of the age gap between them. I believe that both, George and Mordeen's physical features may refer to the title of the books they appear in. George resembles the appearance of a mouse and Mordeen's radiant smile seems like that burning bright light. This may be the reason why Steinbeck has decided to change the titles of both books, to establish a more direct connection between the characters and the title, and to use many allusions that refer to the title of the work as titles in general play an important role in the success of the

work. Therefore, it is possible to establish underlying similarities just from the analysis and comparison of the inner characteristics of these two characters by Steinbeck.

### **3.2 The Inner Characteristics of George Milton and Mordeen Saul**

I believe that the inner characteristics is more crucial for understanding than the outer characteristic. It is more probable that similarities between two characters by one author will arise if we compare their attitudes and thinking than if we compare how they look. What makes this literary analysis a bit more intriguing is that the two compared characters are from different periods of Steinbeck's writing and are total opposites. While Mordeen is successful in life, George is not at all. Firstly, we need to consider that women and men have two different worlds and motivations, at least in Steinbeck's books. They live and think differently, and therefore this distinction will have a fundamental effect on their inner qualities.<sup>67</sup>

George Milton is one of the protagonists of 'Of Mice and Men'. The book focuses more on his companion Lennie, but George is still characterized precisely because he is a leading force that escalates the final tragedy. He starts as a secondary hero; however, the final deed makes him prominent.<sup>68</sup> He contrasts with the character of Lennie not only in his appearance but also in his inner qualities. He is very intelligent, sort of canny, and thoughtful. Lennie's almost animal-like mental deficiency stands in opposition to him. He is a simple humane man. George seems aware of this, and he bravely protects Lennie from any harm by asking him to be silent and talking for him.<sup>69</sup> As he tells Lennie:

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<sup>67</sup> Loftis, A Historical Introduction to *Of Mice and Men* 118

<sup>68</sup> Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck, Excerpt from Chapter 5 83

<sup>69</sup> McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202

"That ranch we're goin' to is right down there about a quarter mile. We're gonna go in an' see the boss. Now, look - I'll give him the work tickets, but you ain't gonna say a word. You jus' stand there and don't say nothing. If he finds out what a crazy bastard you are, we won't get no job, but if he sees ya work before he hears ya talk, we're set. Ya got that?"<sup>70</sup>

George may be considered a humanist for helping and protecting the weak. This attitude makes him a sensitive, compassionate human being. He is a loyal caring companion, but he also does this because he has made a promise to Lennie's aunt to take care of him. He is dependent on Lennie even if he does not always realize it. Firstly, even if he sometimes complains about living with Lennie, he cannot live without him.<sup>71</sup> He belongs nowhere and without him, he is completely alone in the lonely world. George is fully aware of this:

He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to."<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, George is the ego and Lennie is his id, George is the brain and Lennie is his body. Lennie is an intrinsic part of George, and he is so obedient to him that he will do anything for him.<sup>73</sup> As George says:

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<sup>70</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 800-801

<sup>71</sup> McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202

<sup>72</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 806

<sup>73</sup> Li, Small, Lennie. 343-344; Goldhurst, John Steinbeck's Parable Of The Curse Of Cain 50; Shurgot, A Game of Cards in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* 100; Irr, *Queer Borders: Figures from the 1930s for U.S.-Canadian Relations* 162

"Tell you what made me stop that. One day a bunch of guys was standin' around up on the Sacramento River. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turns to Lennie and says, 'Jump in.' An' he jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke. He damn near drowned before we could get him. An' he was so damn nice to me for pullin' him out. Clean forgot I told him to jump in. Well, I ain't done nothing like that no more."<sup>74</sup>

Here George talks boastfully about how obedient Lennie is to him. Based on their strong bond it may be interpreted as pitying Lennie as well. To add to this, George is suspicious and less trusting.<sup>75</sup> As he warns Lennie:

"Lennie!" he said sharply. "Lennie, for God' sakes don't drink so much." Lennie continued to snort into the pool. The small man leaned over and shook him by the shoulder. "Lennie. You gonna be sick like you was last night."<sup>76</sup>

He uses his abilities to be alert to possible dangers that they may experience with Lennie which proves his kind caring nature. He is also firm, but he knows temptation and he might have experienced it before. So now he can give his friend a warning to avoid certain people who arouse temptation, such as when he warns Lennie to avoid Curley's wife as it may lead to complications. He hates promiscuous women like her and wants to avoid them at all costs because he is aware of possible problems that stem from contact with them.<sup>77</sup> He has good knowledge of reaching agreements, manipulating the truth, and employing subterfuge strategies to survive in the complicated world and to pursue his American dream and happiness. He is an idealist and dreams of having a sort of farm – few acres and a small house, where with Lennie he could live an agricultural lifestyle and have animals.<sup>75</sup> As he tells Lennie:

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<sup>74</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 826

<sup>75</sup> McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202

<sup>76</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 798

<sup>77</sup> Emery, *Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men* 128

"Well," said George, "we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof -"<sup>78</sup>

He tells Lennie about their dream, and it always makes Lennie very happy. On the one hand, he does not do this only for himself selfishly. He does this for Lennie, too. On the other hand, as kind, as it sounds, his pursuit of his American dream is not transcendent. At the end of the play-novelette, he becomes a living representation of the lost American dream, which I believe may leave a permanent scar on his future life.<sup>79</sup>

Mordeen Saul is the protagonist of 'Burning Bright'. The play-novelette focuses more on her partner and husband Joe. Therefore, her inner characterization in the work is not very detailed but she is the force leading to the final climax, and this is the reason why a portrayal of her inner qualities appears to at least some extent. I believe that she remains a secondary character throughout the book because even the final act gives more emphasis to her husband's reaction than to her approach to the situation.<sup>80</sup> She is Steinbeck's simple woman of (mostly) earthy attitude, she is nice and helpful. Between Mordeen and Joe may be some contrast in their thinking based on their age gap. However, it is not directly suggested in the work. It seems that she has a past as a prostitute or at least knowledge of a prostitute (which may interestingly suggest further similarities with Curley's wife from 'Of Mice and Men'). Curley's wife is presented as a prostitute, has a jealous partner, and feels lonely just like Mordeen.<sup>81</sup> However, Mordeen paradoxically loves Joe as if he was the only man in the world, her "god". Her selfless love is more than

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<sup>78</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 807

<sup>79</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 806-808; Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 799-821; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202

<sup>80</sup> Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck, Excerpt from Chapter 5* 83

<sup>81</sup> Gladstein, *Of Mice and Men: Creating and Re-creating Curley's Wife* 205-220



mere animalistic desire and makes her willing to do anything for him no matter what sacrifices she must make. As Mordeen tells Victor:

“You do have a gift,” she said. “Instinctively you know where to put the knife and how to twist it. I know what you mean, but you don’t know. You groped blindly and found a thing as precious as a porcelain doorknob in the dark.” She stood up and stepped close to him. Her face was cold and her voice icy. “I want to tell you this,” she said. “Maybe I’m telling myself. I will do anything—anything—anything to bring content to him. See you remember that, Victor.”<sup>82</sup>

Mordeen appreciates Joe’s devotion in their relationship the most and in this sense, she is very loyal. This may be caused by her experience; she can understand the importance of real love. Therefore, she can symbolize a higher love. Only when she feels in an unsafe position, she becomes like a “mother cat”, such as when Victor threatens to reveal the biological paternity of the child and she reacts by saying that she will have to kill him without any emotion. It is possible to describe her as a human paradox that is a species that aspires to act like a god, but however, remains an animal. For example, Mordeen could be considered a wife of selfless love and a person that is capable of murder at the same time. As a pregnant wife, Mordeen is fragile when she gives birth and generally during her whole pregnancy. However, she can be brutal and cold, such as when she tries to stab Victor with a knife to get rid of him because he only attracts problems. I believe that she is an intelligent person with elaborate thinking and a shrewd attitude. She is aware of Joe’s impotency because of an earlier complication of rheumatic fever and because she has already been pregnant in the past, but she presumably had a miscarriage. Her bravery is expressed in her actions, as she protects Joe from the fact that he is sterile by making

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<sup>82</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 23

sure to give him the child that he desperately wants. She knows that adoption is possible, but it would not mean the same as Joe would be aware that the adopted child is not his by blood. She also fights jealous Victor a few times. She is sensitive, for example, she feels hopeless because she cannot give Joe his child at the beginning. Mordeen is a compassionate human being only to Joe, she does not have much sympathy for Victor after using him to get pregnant. Her protection of Joe suggests that she is a caring partner. It needs to be pointed out that she remains a loyal wife even if she had sexual intercourse with another man because firstly, she does not do this for lust or temptation, secondly because she does it only for Joe's well-being, and lastly because she is always faithful and respectful to Joe in her thoughts.<sup>84</sup> As she rejects Victor:

She cried fiercely, "It's Joe Saul's baby, conceived in love for him. I saw his face hovering over me. I felt his arms—not yours. You don't exist in this, Victor. The little seed may have been yours, I have forgotten. But no love was given or offered or taken. No! It's Joe Saul's baby. Joe Saul's and mine."<sup>83</sup>

She is redefining the meaning of faithfulness. Her love for him is completely unconditional.<sup>84</sup> Mordeen, like many female characters of Steinbeck, is limited to two roles in society – the role of a wife and a (future) mother. It is not an undignified position because it emphasizes the female wisdom that she has obtained in these roles.<sup>85</sup> She seems to me like a subordinate woman, who is fully aware of her dependency on her partner. On one hand, she cannot exist without Joe. For example, she feels shattered and hopeless when Joe learns that he is sterile and is angry at her for getting impregnated by someone else because she understands that he may leave her as a consequence of her previous

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<sup>83</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 59

<sup>84</sup> Railsback, Mordeen. 239-240; Railsback, Saul, Joe. 332; Railsback, Child, The. 57-58

<sup>85</sup> Beatty, Sandra. "Steinbeck's Play Women: A Study of the Female Presence in *Of Mice and Men*, *Burning Bright*, *The Moon is Down*, and *Viva Zapata!*" *Steinbeck's Women: Essays in Criticism*, Steinbeck Society of America, English Department, Ball State University, 1979, 7–16.

actions. On the other hand, her absolute obedience to Joe makes her willing to do anything for him and so it makes her vulnerable in this sense. To add to this, Mordeen was probably raised in a circus, and she lives in one now, too. This type of living usually requires a lot of traveling for performances. Therefore, she knows that she belongs nowhere because of the constant moving from place to place, just like George and Lennie. She is a lonely woman as she has only the acquaintance with Friend Ed, who is more of a friend to Joe. Even later, in other acts, there is nobody else besides Friend Ed, Joe, and Victor. This limited company prevents Mordeen from bonding with other men or women and therefore becoming less lonely. For example, no one could give her a piece of advice in the hopeless situation of Joe's sterility besides Friend Ed and Victor. Another explanation for her lonely depressing representation could be the abundance of patriarchal forces and the absence of other females in general.<sup>86</sup> As Charlotte C. Hadella notes:

In early story collections by each author—Steinbeck's *The Long Valley*, published in 1938, and Welty's *A Curtain of Green*, published in 1941—a number of female characters are lonely, repressed, and in some cases depraved because of the patriarchal forces which mold their personalities and limit their arenas of action.<sup>86</sup>

Hadella refers to Steinbeck's *The Long Valley*, however, I believe this could be also applied to 'Burning Bright' (and 'Of Mice and Men' with the focus on the Curley's wife). Additionally, Mordeen's quick solution to the problem suggests that she is alert to possible danger, and she knows cunning strategies to survive and how to manipulate the truth so she can find happiness and her version of the American dream. She is also a little bit of an idealist. She strives to create a perfect ending for herself and Joe despite visible

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<sup>86</sup> Hadella, *Lonely Ladies and Landscapes: A Comparison of John Steinbeck's "The White Quail" and Eudora Welty's "A Curtain of Green"* 69

obstructions. Her American dream might mean only making Joe happy. However, for Joe, it is continuing his bloodline and having a family. I believe that she simply accepts Joe's version of the American dream as her own. Her pursuit is more transcendent than selfish in this sense. At the end of 'Burning Bright', she becomes a mother and represents a gainer of her version of the American dream and the gratifying future is affirmed by the optimistic ending.<sup>87</sup>

In 'Of Mice and Men' Steinbeck explores the theme of loneliness, and also a special bond between two people despite being almost complete opposites in their inner and outer characterization. The sharp differences between George Milton and Lennie Small may imply a larger, more general, contrast, such as motion and motionless, aggression and submission, and life and death.<sup>88</sup> As previously noted, George feels lonely. This forces him to share labor in a community and to form an intimate partnership of protection and affection with Lennie. It is a special relationship, almost a sort of partnership, which signifies the emotional and thematic center of the work.<sup>89</sup> Some critics (namely Mark Spilka, Jean Emery, or Leland S. Person) question gender roles probably because of the unusually strong bond between the two men. George is positioned as a clever wife and Lennie as a tough husband.<sup>90</sup> George is responsible and does all the things for Lennie, including the use of his brain for both. Besides the labor, they also share their version of the American dream, which is centered on the agrarian lifestyle.<sup>91</sup> I believe that they represent a form of a family as they do not want to be alone, and their American dream suggests a peaceful family life. Contrary to their dependency on each other, George

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<sup>87</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 92-93

<sup>88</sup> McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 191

<sup>89</sup> Person, *Of Mice and Men: Steinbeck's Speculations in Manhood* 154

<sup>90</sup> Person, *Of Mice and Men: Steinbeck's Speculations in Manhood* 150

<sup>91</sup> McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 200; Emery, *Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men* 125-126; Meyer, *One is the Loneliest Number: Steinbeck's Paradoxical Attraction and Repulsion to Isolation/Solitude* 297; Hadella, *Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* 138; Johnson, *Reading the Character of Crooks in Of Mice and Men: A Black Writer's Perspective* 246

often says that he wishes for the end of this relationship and to be alone.<sup>92</sup> It may sound selfish of him, but it needs to be taken into account that living with Lennie has a lot of drawbacks that prevent George from experiencing pleasures, such as playing cards, drinking whiskey, or having a female partner in his life. It also impedes him from their version of the American dream.<sup>93</sup> This fact makes George frustrated, and he complains about it frequently. As he tells Lennie:

"God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess 'all, and when the end of the month come I coul' take my fifty bucks and go into town and get what' ever I want. Why, I could stay in a cat house night. I could eat any place I want, hotel or an place, and order any damn thing I could think of. An' I could do all that every damn month. Get a gallon of whisky, or set in a pool room and play cards or shoot pool."<sup>94</sup>

Throughout the book, George realizes that a relationship could have its positives and negatives. Such a bond could be difficult and frustrating as well as pleasant and fecund. The atypical bond with Lennie that brings a lot of self-sacrifices, burdens and hardships make George question this companionship.<sup>95</sup> In this sense George is a conflicted character and his internal struggle concerns whether he should part ways with Lennie or not. It is difficult for him to decide, and he is aware of this.<sup>96</sup> This dilemma climaxes in the final tragedy of the work and leads to the inevitable bad ending. George is forced to kill Lennie to save him from torture by Curley. It is foreshadowed by the

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<sup>92</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 804-805; Shurgot, *A Game of Cards in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* 100

<sup>93</sup> Meyer, *One is the Loneliest Number: Steinbeck's Paradoxical Attraction and Repulsion to Isolation/Solitude* 290-306

<sup>94</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 804

<sup>95</sup> Johnson, *Reading the Character of Crooks in Of Mice and Men: A Black Writer's Perspective* 240; Meyer, *One is the Loneliest Number: Steinbeck's Paradoxical Attraction and Repulsion to Isolation/Solitude* 297-298

<sup>96</sup> Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck, Excerpt from Chapter 5* 83; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 196; Emery, *Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men* 131

shooting of Candy's old dog. Lennie is now intractable, and George follows the example from the farm. He unconsciously chooses masculinity over their compassion and over the femininity that he represents in the relationship. There are many interpretations considering the gender roles of Lennie and George, from George avoiding adult sexuality to positing Lennie as a stereotypically docile submissive woman. Relations between them are infantilized and homosexualized. Leland Person follows these studies differently. He destabilizes the conventional construct of being masculine and explores male bonding. He also employs a concept of male companionship without homosexuality.<sup>97</sup> However, I do not agree with the interpretation of gender roles in this work because I believe that the relationship is simply not that complex. Shortly before Lennie's death, George seems primarily motivated by the fact that he is directing a socially unacceptable person to his perfect world, and he makes him imagine his dreams to die happily.<sup>98</sup> As Steinbeck later commented in a letter to Annie Laurie Williams:

Everyone in the world has a dream he knows can't come off but he spends his life hoping it may. This is at once the sadness, the greatness and the triumph of our species. And this belief on stage must go from skepticism to possibility to probability before it is nipped off by whatever the modern word for fate is. And in hopelessness—George is able to rise to greatness—to kill his friend to save him. George is a hero and only heroes are worth writing about.<sup>99</sup>

This declares George to be a rare hero, who rises to greatness by shooting his friend to save him.<sup>100</sup> Besides George killing the dream he is also making an ultimate heroic gesture

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<sup>97</sup> Person, *Of Mice and Men: Steinbeck's Speculations in Manhood* 150-151

<sup>98</sup> Timmerman, *John Steinbeck's Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken: "Of Mice and Men"* (Chapter 4) 104-110.

<sup>99</sup> Elaine Stenbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds., *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*. New York: Viking Press, 1975 562-563

<sup>100</sup> Elaine Stenbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds. 562-563

of responsibility and sacrifice. He acts as his brother's keeper in this final act of sympathy.<sup>101</sup> By this Steinbeck explores how ambiguous love can be. Lennie's protector, George becomes his murderer, and his deed oscillates between kindness and cruelty.<sup>102</sup> George is trying to escape Lennie's destiny but it is the connection of various circumstances that makes Lennie's fate inevitable. George's fearless act of Lennie's murder makes the ending tragic. The theme of animalistic behavior in connection with the nonmorality of nature that leads to the survival of the fittest and a Darwinian philosophy of evolution underlies the tragic fate even if Steinbeck speculates about it in a more sophisticated ethical way of dealing with people like Lennie. To explain it, the Darwinian theory claims surviving the fittest at both physical and mental level.<sup>103</sup> The problem is that Lennie possesses only good physical abilities, and the environment full of dangers for him, such as possible fights with Curley. Steinbeck employs this biological determinism and suggests naturalistically that Lennie and others cannot survive as their abnormalities may lead to few rare opportunities to choose, but always lead to eventually inevitably tragic fates.<sup>104</sup> As he wrote regarding Candy's old dog:

"He don't have no fun," Carlson insisted. "And he stinks to beat hell. Tell you what. I'll shoot him for you. Then it won't be you that does it."

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<sup>101</sup> Railsback, Milton George. 232; Li, Small, Lennie. 343-344; Owens, Deadly Kids, Stinking Dogs, and Heroes: The Best Laid Plans in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* 223; Goldhurst, John Steinbeck's Parable Of The Curse Of Cain 51; Hart, Richard E. "Moral Experience in 'Of Mice and Men': Challenges and Reflection." *The Steinbeck Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, pp. 31-44. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583611>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2022.

<sup>102</sup> Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, Excerpt from Chapter 5 83; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 191

<sup>103</sup> Mayr, Ernst. "The Philosophical Foundations of Darwinism." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 145, no. 4, 2001, pp. 488-95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558188>. Accessed 26 Apr. 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Li, *Of Mice and Men (Book)*. 254-257; Goldhurst, John Steinbeck's Parable Of The Curse Of Cain 49; Heavilin, *Emotion Recollected in Tranquility: A Context for Romanticism in Of Mice and Men* 281-284

Candy threw his legs off his bunk. He scratched the white stubble whiskers on his cheek nervously. "I'm so used to him," he said softly. "I had him from a pup."<sup>105</sup>

The killing and therefore dealing with Lennie is foreshadowed by the shooting of Candy's old dog. For the ranch society, he seems useless now and it has negative qualities, so they get rid of it. It is one step further from shooting dogs to killing people. This ranch unconsciously practices the mechanism of Darwinism and natural selection.<sup>106</sup> George's later lie about Lennie's death may suggest deep emotion inside him, but according to Jean Emery it is not true:

His lie about the actual events of Lennie's death, which on the surface suggests deep-felt emotion, actually serves to enhance his own male stature: diminutive George wrestling the giant, bonecrushing brute, Lennie, for a loaded Luger—and winning, getting off a clean shot to the back of the neck like a skilled marksman—a narrative straight out of a Western pulp magazine.<sup>107</sup>

This interpretation relates to the theories of gender roles and George's feminine role in the relationship between him and Lennie.<sup>108</sup> The work closes with the forming of a new bond for George with another man from the farm, Slim. As Slims tells him:

Slim twitched George's elbow. "Come on, George. Me an' you'll go in an' get a drink."

George let himself be helped to his feet. "Yeah, a drink."

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<sup>105</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 830

<sup>106</sup> Owens, *Deadly Kids, Stinking Dogs, and Heroes: The Best Laid Plans in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* 227

<sup>107</sup> Emery, *Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men* 129

<sup>108</sup> Emery, *Manhood Beset: Misogyny in Of Mice and Men* 129-131



Slim said, "You hadda, George. I swear you had-da. Come on with me." He led George into the entrance of the trail and up toward the highway.<sup>109</sup>

Slims offer George the bond, and they symbolically walk away as George is entering a new social circle.<sup>110</sup> All things considered, I believe that it is a matter of interpretation whether he feels the loss and the reasoning behind his lie after Lennie's death. What is important is that he has become a sacrificing hero through the tragedy. In 'Burning Bright' Steinbeck also focuses on a special bond and love that connects two people of opposite natures. Their contrast lies in the significant age gap between Mordeen and Joe and other complications that stem from that. This suggests a more crucial contrast between fertility and sterility. It is a matter of question whether this partnership is partially formed to avoid their loneliness as Mordeen discusses this topic and says that she was pleased if someone showed interest in her before. Their intimate bond is a marriage of affection and protection similar to George's. Mordeen is an intelligent wife for tougher and wiser Joe. Even if Joe proves his wisdom in the end, she is the one who is responsible and does everything for him including thinking. This partnership could be considered the thematic and emotional center of the work because it leads to the final climax. They already represent a family, but another focus of the work is their American dream, which means forming a complete unit with the child. Additionally, it needs to be clarified that the cause of Joe's impotence is not his age but his experience. If he were younger, he may not have had that problem. To add to this, at the start of the play they have been married for three years, which is quite a long time to conceive a baby. Joe may also feel pressure to have kids as he is about 50 years old. He understands that he is losing his vitality and may think that it will not be possible to have a child later because of his age. Both Joe and Mordeen

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<sup>109</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 878

<sup>110</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 877-878; Owens, *Deadly Kids, Stinking Dogs, and Heroes: The Best Laid Plans in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* 233

feel deeply frustrated by not being able to conceive. Joe's desperation even leads to his escapism in the form of drinking. Mordeen understands that relationships bring hardships and self-sacrifices. It is not directly expressed in the play-novelette, but I believe that Mordeen becomes conflicted because of an internal dilemma of whether she should or should not conceive the child another way and let her husband believe that he is the father. She is an exceptional heroine who brings the crucial hope by getting pregnant. She is doing a deed of sacrifice and responsibility for her husband.

Both 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Burning Bright' employ the element of sacrifice. Mordeen is paving their way to happiness. The ambiguity of relationships and love is also explored. Mordeen is a faithful wife that has sexual intercourse with another man. To prove her love and kindness she is cruel. She is trying to escape reality with lies; however, the circumstances make her destiny inevitable. In general, Steinbeck explores Darwinian philosophy and the non-morality of nature similar to 'Of Mice and Men'. Joe has a weak physical side; nature prevents him from becoming a father. The fate is inevitable, Mordeen must get impregnated by Victor, who senses Joe's weak spot and is the only possible choice for her. By this, she is choosing the least evil out of poor choices. Her brave plan and generally vicious deed of exploiting Victor lead to something miraculous, the child. The later destiny of Joe realizing that the child is not his is also inevitable because he must suspiciously find this out sooner or later and deal with that fact. He goes through introspection and accepts the child as his and as a gift to him. He starts to understand that the child is not only the continuing of his bloodline but also a human breed and that this is more important than his personal needs.<sup>111</sup> As John Ditsky notes:

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<sup>111</sup> Ditsky, "Your Own Mind Coming Out in the Garden": Steinbeck's Elusive Woman 83; Cederstrom, Beyond the Boundaries of Sexism: The Archetypal Feminine versus Anima Women in Steinbeck's Novels 189-204.

In this sense, many of Steinbeck's women can be seen, if not as extraordinary individuals in the career sense, at least as what the jargon of another field of study might term "facilitators"—those who make it possible for others, especially men, to advance to new levels of comprehension, or community.<sup>112</sup>

Mordeen is one of Steinbeck's women with the role of "facilitator".<sup>112</sup> Finally, Joe is entering a new thinking system thanks to Mordeen and is presumably re-bonding with her after getting distant after realizing what has happened. As Steinbeck writes:

He tore the mask from his face, and his face was shining and his eyes were shining. "Mordeen," he said, "I love the child." His voice swelled and he spoke loudly. "Mordeen, I love our child." And he raised his head and cried in triumph, "Mordeen, I love my son."<sup>113</sup>

The birth of the child is represented by a bright light and alludes to hope.<sup>114</sup>

The non-teleological thinking (as discussed on pages 12 and 13) and religiosity are broadly explored in 'Of Mice and Men'. Concerning the non-teleological philosophy, the original title 'Something That Happened' indicates the meaning. It implies that life is what it is rather than what it should be. George must understand that things are not always the way that people want them to be. The ending is in this sense a part of a pattern of events, not a tragedy. According to Peter Lisca, there may be found a part about George's frustration that stems from living with Lennie and his dependency on him that play an important role in the pattern of events.<sup>115</sup> Steinbeck's religiosity which is based on his background is implemented in his books in the allegorical layer that is inspired by the

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<sup>112</sup> Ditsky, "Your Own Mind Coming Out in the Garden": Steinbeck's Elusive Woman 83

<sup>113</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 93

<sup>114</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 93; Railsback, Mordeen. 239-240; Railsback, Saul, Joe. 332; Railsback, Child, The. 57-58

<sup>115</sup> Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, Chapter 8 41; Li, *Of Mice and Men (Book)*. 254-257; Meyer, *The 1960s and 1970s* 46; Etheridge, *Non-teleological Thinking*. 250-251

Bible. There is a parallel between the work, the question of whether we are our brother's keeper, and the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. Cain (George) kills his brother Abel (in this case his companion Lennie). George's story helps society understand a dark "hero" that is able to accept the guilty consciousness and the responsibility for the murder to be his brother's keeper contrary to Cain. It also raises the question of how much responsibility one can transfer to oneself, which has been a controversial topic in American culture with its variously loose social contracts of friendship and family. To add to this, to feel empathy towards George (Cain) it is necessary to reassess what is "evil". George's violence needs to be understood in the context of responsibility and efforts to deal with innocent, child-like Lennie. It is George, who accepts this burden for the good of others.<sup>116</sup>

The theme of non-teleological philosophy and religiosity are also dramatized in 'Burning Bright'. Firstly, the ending is simply what it is. There is no questioning how it could be or should be, but rather how it is. Joe gets the child from Mordeen, so he must accept it without much pondering. It is that Mordeen got to make their American dream the reality that matters.<sup>117</sup> Steinbeck's religious background led him to include biblical elements, here even more than in 'Of Mice and Men'. All characters in the work are allegorical. However, with Joe Saul the inspiration is heavy-handed. Joe is a walking symbol and an everyman in various settings rather than a human being. He undergoes a transition from an old bitter man of waning zeal to the enlightened man that loves the child and who leaves his wishes behind. For example, the character of Joe is inspired by the rivalry between King Saul and the young David (Victor) from the Old Testament.

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<sup>116</sup> Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*. 873-878; *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Genesis 4:1-26); Goldhurst, John Steinbeck's Parable Of The Curse Of Cain 49-61; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 193-195; Meyer, *The 1960s and 1970s* 46; McEntyre, *Of Mice and Men: A Story of Innocence Retained* 187-202; McEntyre, *Bible, The*. 28-29

<sup>117</sup> Etheridge, *Non-teleological Thinking*. 250-251

King Saul was destroyed by his jealousy and anger because people were more amazed by David's victory over giant Goliath than by all of Saul's victories. Therefore, king Saul chased him to kill him, and being unsuccessful he wasted a lot of time.<sup>118</sup> Joe is also an allusion to the selfish Saul from the New Testament who had persecuted early followers of Jesus Christ. This Saul on his way to Damascus becomes temporarily blind but remains forever the enlightened and converted apostle Paul.<sup>119</sup> According to Lisca, the work resembles the Christ story. Joe is also reminiscent of Joseph, Mordeen and her blue clothes are similar to Mary and her traditional gown, the biological paternity of the child is not Joe's just like Joseph is presumably not Christ's biological father. Their wandering to the hospital reminds of the search for the inn in the Bible. Finally, the birth of the child at Christmas as a miracle is a crucial biblical element with its allusion to the bright light and hope.<sup>120</sup> However, 'Burning Bright' is undermined by reality. For example, Mordeen has a probable past as a prostitute, and Victor is the biological father who was murdered. The morale of this is that the human race are animals and gods at the same time. They have to understand this, so they can survive themselves, which leads to the positive ending of the story.<sup>121</sup>

To conclude, concerning the inner characteristics, George Milton and Mordeen Saul paradoxically proved to be very similar. Both are characters in a book that gives more attention to their partner. They are leading forces to the final climax. George is precisely characterized and becomes a prominent hero, whereas Mordeen is not described that much, and remains a secondary character throughout the play-novelette.

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<sup>118</sup> Samuel (KJV 18:6-30); Samuel (KJV 19:1-24)

<sup>119</sup> Acts (KJV 7:54-60); Acts (KJV 8:1-3); Acts (KJV 9:1-22)

<sup>120</sup> Matthew (KJV 1:1-25); Luke (KJV 2:1-33)

<sup>121</sup> Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 80-93; Railsback, *Saul, Joe*. 332; Railsback, *Burning Bright*. 41-43

Concerning religion and the non-teleological thinking, both play-novelettes employ these similarly by using the philosophy of “life is what it is” and the allegorical layer of protagonists inspired by the biblical characters. Both works explore themes of loneliness, the ambiguity of a relationship, and a special bond between two people that are of opposite nature.

The smaller differences (such as the appearance) lead to larger contrasts. The intimate relationships are bonds of affection and protection, and for George also of sharing the labor. These partnerships are the emotional and thematic centers of play-novelettes. It is open for debate how close is George and Lennie’s bond to Mordeen and Joe’s. They represent a family like Joe and Mordeen, and the analysis positions George’s gender role as a clever wife similarly to Mordeen and Lennie as a tough husband resembling Joe. Additionally, both George and Mordeen are ordinary people with a humane attitude that contrasts with their counterparts. They are intelligent, thoughtful, and even canny, so they know how to deal with the deficiencies of their partners. The non-morality of nature in connection with Darwinian philosophy leads to inevitable fate. Lennie has a weakness on the mental side and Joe on his physical side. George and Mordeen are aware of this, and they protect bravely their companions as their sensitive, compassionate partners. They are responsible for their counterparts and willingly do all possible things for them including the thinking. They may get frustrated by what is happening, but they are loyal human beings who care about their loved ones. The connection with another person brings them pleasant times but self-sacrifice and hardships as well. They are both split characters with internal struggles and a dilemma. Their dependency on the other half is noticeable. They cannot live without their partner. Mordeen always takes this fact into account, while George is sometimes not aware of that. This dependency could be justified by the reality that they belong nowhere, and they

are lonely. Additionally, what is interesting is the switch of the power relations in the relationships. In the friendship between George and Lennie the latter is the obedient companion, whereas in the other partnership Mordeen is the obedient one. To add to this, George and Mordeen are similarly suspicious and alert people that do not trust others easily. They know how to reach agreements, how to use strategies to survive and manipulate the truth to achieve happiness and their version of the American dream that they want to share with their partners. They have ideals, but their dream and their approach differ (George is more selfish in his pursuit than Mordeen), and lastly, the outcome is distinct. Whereas George becomes the representative of the lost American dream, Mordeen becomes successful. There appears a contrast in sexual experience of Mordeen and George. On one side, George has the previous bad memories and now he avoids and hates promiscuous women. On the other side, Mordeen's knowledge suggests the past of an ex-prostitute, and therefore a woman that would get hatred from George in the past.

Finally, the climax and the outcome are in both cases inevitable. The net of circumstances makes their attempts to change it impossible. For George it is the tragedy, for Mordeen it is the happiness. Nevertheless, they are rare people. George is going through the sacrifice and responsibility of killing his friend to be his brother's keeper, Mordeen's sacrifice and taking responsibility relates to her pregnancy. This creates a paradox in both cases and employs the theme of ambiguity of love. George expresses his kindness by the cruel deed, he protects Lennie by shooting him. Mordeen shows her loving faithful soul through the ruthless action of infidelity. She proves her love for Joe by being unfaithful to Joe. At the end of the play-novelettes relationships acquire a new role, George is forming a new friendship and Mordeen is re-bonding with Joe. Both, George with Slim and Mordeen with Joe are entering a new social arrangement.





## Conclusion

The main aim of this work was the comparison of the characters from John Ernst Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Burning Bright', George Milton and Mordeen Saul. Firstly, the thesis discussed Steinbeck's life, which influenced his books in several ways. The chapters explored the main points in his life that had formed his thinking, including the friendship with Edward Ricketts, the divorce from his first wife Carol Henning, non-teleological philosophy, and religion. The second chapter introduced the reader to the works 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Burning Bright' in relation to the theatrical aspects, success, and the similarities and differences between them.

Chapter 3 started with the comparison of the outer appearance and Motivation of George Milton and Mordeen Saul. It was discovered that they share some underlying similarities. At first look, their companions are close to them. Mordeen has Joe, and Lennie accompanies George. They contrast their companions; small dark George looks even smaller next to big fair Lennie, and young Mordeen makes Joe appear even older than he already is. The chapter also concluded that the clothes that George and Mordeen wear are related to their occupation, and they employ them so that it positively affects their working life. George wears practical clothes for his hard work, Mordeen wears bold clothes to attract attention in the circus. It also pointed out the contrast in appearance between dark George and fair Mordeen, function and beauty. In general, their facial features play role in their lives. The thesis also suggested that their physical features may also refer to the title of the books they are from with George as a mouse and Mordeen's burning bright smile, which may have led to the change of the titles of both works.

The last chapter focused on the character's inner qualities and motivations. George and Mordeen proved to have many similarities. It was discovered that although they are leading forces to the final climax of the work more attention is dedicated to their

companions. Both works explored the theme of loneliness, the ambiguity of relationships, special bonds between people of opposite nature in connection with religion, and non-teleological thinking. Mordeen and George have these intimate bonds of affection and protection that are emotional and thematic centers of the works. With their companions, they represent a family unit. The thesis also concluded that George and Mordeen are ordinary people, they are both humane, intelligent, and even canny. They are brave compassionate partners, and they find solutions to the problems of the deficiencies of their companions, which they are aware of. The relationship with their companion brings them self-sacrifice and burden, and therefore they may be frustrated. This causes them to be split characters with dilemmas as they are extremely dependent on their troublesome partners. The thesis explained that they cannot leave because they are already lonely, and they belong nowhere. They also must be suspicious and not trust easily. They are willing to do anything for their loved ones: they take over the responsibility of their partners, employ survival strategies, and manipulate the truth. This is the price for their happiness and their version of the American dream that they picture with their companions. However, fate is in both cases inevitable. The chapter pointed out the fact that there comes the final sacrifice on both sides, George kills his companion and Mordeen produces a child that is not biologically Joe's. The thesis discussed the ambiguity of these deeds: through their cruel actions they express their kindness and loyalty and help their partners. It was concluded that they also enter new social arrangements at the end, George forms a new friendship and Mordeen creates a complete family with Joe and the child.

All in all, I believe that the thesis leads to a valuable conclusion that may inspire and contribute to further research in the area of Steinbeck's characters, his themes, even the recurring psychology of the characters of other authors in general, and much more.

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