

# ジョン・スタインベックの憎悪の対象

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## An Analysis of John Steinbeck's Objects of Hatred

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**要 旨** 紀要14集の "John Steinbeck's Last Warning" で述べた通り、1960年代のスタインベックは、21世紀に悪化することとなる先進国における文明病の芽を見て取り、真剣に憂えていた。人間性のうちの何が、物質面で豊かな社会における悪と病いにつながってしまったのだろうか？我々の社会はなぜ、スタインベックの言う「無目的な動物小屋」になり下がってしまったのだろうか？この先我々がとるべき道を探る前にまず、彼の作品の中からスタインベックが嫌悪したものを拾いあげ、これらを反面教師とすることが得策だと思われる。

スタインベックは、人と他の動物に対する殺戮を恥ずべきものだと考えていた。そして、直接的に命を奪うもの以外にも、人の生き生きとした生命力を奪う社会の間違ったシステム、特に極端な機械化を危険視していた。

作品 *The Pearl* の中で彼は、いつの世にもある人間性の中で最も悪しきものとして、“強欲” “憎悪” “冷淡” を挙げている。これらが行過ぎた機械化や大企業の強大化と結びついた時、人は大量生産の渦の中で、労働の意味と自分自身の意味を見失った。共同作業を忘れ、間違った個人主義に向かった我々は、より冷淡で貪欲になり、他者や世界を簡単に憎悪するようになってしまった。先進国では、金銭と引き換え得る物と便利さがあふれる中、人々の関係や命に関することまでもが流れ作業的に扱われ、スタインベックの危惧していた通りの生気に乏しい無機質な時代が訪れている。

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### Introduction

As described in "John Steinbeck's Last Warning," Steinbeck's genuine love of humanity enabled him to warn against a newly born evil social disease in developed countries (Kubota 14). In 1966, just two years before his death, he saw his *America and Americans* published. The situation since then, however, has become progressively worse, making us question what facets of human nature have led us to such social evil and mental problems that accompany our material prosperity.

Why did our society descend to what the author described as a "kennel of animals with no purpose and no direction" (*A & A* 139)? Steinbeck pointed out that the rules and morals that had developed

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over a long period had now become meaningless in today's modern society. Although society needs new rules and new morals, Steinbeck's premature death from heart failure deprived him of the opportunity to provide an element of guidance as to which direction we should take in the future.

This therefore means that in looking to take the most appropriate course of action we cannot help but take our cue from his other works. It is against this background that carrying out an analysis of Steinbeck's loves and hates would be helpful as his writings contain his hopes for the wholesome preservation of humanity. In this study I will first touch on the objects of Steinbeck's extreme dislikes and use these as negative examples.

## **I. Slaughter and Killing**

The soldier in *The Forgotten Village* says to the boy, Juan Diego, "Yours is the true people's work," ... "saving, not killing; growing, not dying (*FV* 99)." This character appears to reveal himself as an *alter ego* of the writer. It is obvious Steinbeck had a true sense of revulsion towards killing and any weapons that have the potential to cause the death of a great number of people. He informed readers of *America and Americans* of the atomic bomb in the following passage:

... we are an exuberant people, careless and destructive as active children. We make strong and potent tools and then have to use them to prove that they exist. Under the pressure of war we finally made the atom bomb, and for reasons which seemed justifiable at the time we dropped it on two Japanese cities—and I think we finally frightened ourselves. In such things, one must consult himself because there is no other point of reference. I did not know about the bomb, and certainly I had nothing to do with its use, but I am horrified and ashamed; and nearly everyone I know feels the same thing. And those who loudly and angrily justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki—why, they must be the most ashamed of all (*A & A* 130).

Steinbeck, who had an organic perspective towards life, felt a sense of real abhorrence towards the useless slaughter of animals other than just human beings. In a passage of *Travels with Charley* the author mocked the actions of American hunters.

If I were hungry, I would happily hunt anything .... But it isn't hunger that drives millions of armed American males to forests and hills every autumn, .... Somehow the hunting process has to do with masculinity, but I don't quite know how. I know there are any number of good and efficient hunters who know what they are doing; but many more are overweight gentlemen, primed with whisky and armed with high - powered rifles. They shoot at anything that moves or looks as though it might, and their success in killing one another may well prevent a population explosion. If the casualties were limited to their own kind there would be no problem, but the

slaughter of cows, pigs, farmers, dogs, and highway signs makes autumn a dangerous season in which to travel (*TC* 57).

From his works we even know that Steinbeck was reluctant in his attitudes towards fishing and he felt that killing more than one can eat was both incomprehensible and meaningless. Steinbeck humorously wrote that, "My wants are simple. I have no desire to latch onto a monster symbol of fate and prove my manhood in titanic piscine war. But sometimes I do like a couple of cooperative fish of frying size (*TC* 128)." This second sentence is somewhat indicative of Ernest Hemingway and his works. Jackson J. Benson regarded Hemingway as the hunter and Steinbeck as the farmer, and regarded the two authors' different ways of looking at the modern world as a marked contrast (Benson 225 - 226). The difference between the two authors is the subject of my next thesis, whose core theme is the objects of Steinbeck's love and affection.

## **II. Systems of Cruelty**

### **a. Racial Discrimination**

It is clear that Steinbeck took a firm stand against racism. As Susan Shillinglaw wrote, "John Steinbeck was perhaps the first American writer to protest Japanese internment (Shillinglaw 16)." He traveled to Washington D.C. for a meeting with the director of the Office of the Coordinator of Information, in which he clearly expressed his views. Steinbeck sought a far more humane solution to this controversial issue. Though he was aware of the biological fact that "white chicks will kill a black chick every time (*Log* 248)", at the same time Steinbeck always acted in the hope of there being a higher human quality. Of course, while internment was not the same as a system of mass murder, Steinbeck was nevertheless reluctant to see anybody being robbed of the everyday life that they deserved to live. From his writings it is clear that Steinbeck hated systems and ideas that confined people to a situation where there was no hope of life.

### **b. Bureaucracy**

Steinbeck also disliked systems in which humans were not considered human. During his travels with Charley, the bureaucracy he associated with minor officials had a severe effect on Steinbeck's pride.

I find out of long experience that I admire all nations and hate all governments, and nowhere is my natural anarchism more aroused than at national borders where patient and efficient public servants carry out their duties in matters on immigration and customs (*TC* 84).

For these types of people a mere slip of paper was more important than personalities and facts.

Steinbeck felt that government could make people "feel so small" and strip a person of his or her "sense of self-importance (*TC* 88)". Just like Steinbeck, we are forced to feel as if we are just numbers or codes.

### **c. Large Corporations**

Steinbeck was also skeptical of large companies, which he thought treated people in a very mechanical manner, just as governments did. The author's close friend, Ed Ricketts once said, "If General Motors or Dupont or General Foods should form an army, no national army could last against it for a moment (*A & A* 86)." Performing "its function for a minimum of cost and a maximum of profit," a large corporation is "much more efficient than any existing government." Despite these feelings, however, Steinbeck went on to make the following depiction of the corporate world:

... but there is one thing the corporation cannot do. When it enters fields of individual creative -ness it not only fails but it shrivels the creator. It cannot order the writing of good books and plays, the painting of great pictures, the composing of exquisite music. Where it has entered such fields, it has succeeded only in adulterating the product and eventually destroying the producer. In the production of food, clothing, shelter, minor entertainment, and the gadgetry of comfort the corporation has not only fulfilled our needs but sometimes created them. Only in our yearning toward greatness is it helpless (*A & A* 86).

Such types of large corporation tend to be unsuccessful in bringing out the best in each individual and his or her potential for creativity. These companies want the general public to follow the latest trends in fashion in as mechanical a way as possible while remaining in thrall to business. What Steinbeck felt was the most valuable concept for mankind, however, was our capacity for "our yearning toward greatness," - something that is not temporary but universal.

## **III. The Mechanized World**

### **a. Excessive Mechanization**

During his travels with Charley, Steinbeck came across a variety of vending machines at a rest stop alongside a highway.

... in these dining palaces were vending machines where various coins could deliver handkerchiefs, comb - and - nail - file sets, ... I found myself entranced with these gadgets ... the hot - soup machine is the triumph. Choose among ten—pea, chicken noodle, beef and veg., and insert the coin. A rumbling hum comes from the giant and a sign lights up that read "Heating." After a minute a red light flashes on and off until you open a little door and remove the paper cup of

boiling hot soup.

It is life at a peak of some kind of civilization. The restaurant accommodations, great scallops of counters with simulated leather stools, are as spotless as and not unlike the lavatories. Everything that can be captured and held down is sealed in clear plastic. The food is oven-fresh, spotless and tasteless; untouched by human hands. I remembered with an ache certain dishes in France and Italy touched by innumerable human hands (*TC* 90 - 91).

As the passage above shows, Steinbeck was at first fascinated with the machines, much like a little boy, before he went on to actually taste the food and find it tasteless; he missed the element of human labor that goes into its preparation. I think that he must also have had a sense of intuitive anxiety; though cutting-edge machines appear attractive, Steinbeck believed that excessive mechanization had a number of harmful effects on society and the health of the human condition.

#### **b. Decreasing Human Value**

Machinery, to Steinbeck, initially appeared to be a solution to a variety of problems and a potential aid to humans that could eliminate the need for hard labor. All too soon, however, employers started to make the connection between automation and increased profits. History was to show that increasing mechanization was to lead to increasing unemployment and misery. Steinbeck described the situation thus, "our babies live and we have no work for their hands. We retire men and women at the age of their best service for no other reason than that we need their jobs for younger people. (*A & A* 141)."

Even those people who were employed during this period were preoccupied with the idea that machinery was faster and more accurate than anything a human could provide. Workers had to keep up with the changing speed of machinery, and continue learning how to use these new machines accurately. The whole surrounding environment that was related to such machines was also subject to rapid changes, which ensured that people were kept constantly busy. This is without mentioning the need to maintain and repair all of these machines. In contrast to this, however, many administrators didn't think it necessary to constantly update their machinery and carry out innovation in keeping with every little invention. Instead, they simply used temporary workers and discarded them when they were no longer necessary. This period was one in which many peoples' status was below that of machines, while others had actually descended the social ladder to become servants of the machinery itself without even noticing the fact.

#### **c. The Lost Meaning of Labor**

Jim Nolan, one of the protagonists of *In Dubious Battle*, worked in a department store. One night as he was walking home from a movie theater, Jim stopped to watch a riot without realizing what

was actually going on and was subsequently arrested by the police. When Webb, Jim's boss, was informed that he had attended a radical meeting, he simply stated that he "never heard of [Jim] (*Dubious* 15)." For Webb, Jim was an easily expendable worker, while for Jim the experience made him "feel dead," and he was in a mood where "[e]verything in the past is gone." Today, large companies are just as faceless and heartless as Steinbeck suggested. Employees feel as if they are just a small cog in the overall mechanism of sales and profits. Compounding these factors in the modern world is the fact that nowadays workers are expected and ordered to make products for strangers; most of them never expect to be like Steinbeck and take pleasure in using their "hands." In reading *In Dubious Battle*, one cannot help but feel that a number of years have elapsed since its writing.

"Who produces the goods?" Joy demanded.

"Why... the workers," said Jim.

A foxy look came on Joy's face, a very wise and secret look. "And who takes the profits?"

"The people with invested capital."

Joy shouted, "But they don't produce nothing. What right they got to the profits?" (*Dubious* 26)

In this day and age exactly how many workers can say that they are the ones who are producing goods? Machines are increasingly taking the leading role and workers are taking only the minor parts on the stage of production and manufacture.

Moreover, just to meet the requirements of business performance, salespeople have to sell unnecessary goods and services to equally unwilling people. Can we call these people who try and foist such goods on others, true workers or laborers? With the exception of capitalists, we cannot let such worthless products and business become people's reasons for living.

#### **IV. Greed and Unnatural Actions**

##### **a. Mass Production**

"[H]umans are never satisfied, ... you give them one thing and they want something more. (*Pearl* 25)." Steinbeck's *Pearl* teaches us that one of our "evil limbs" is greed (*Pearl* 43). The meeting of human greed with mechanization gave birth to uncontrollable mass production. This therefore resulted in the need to sell an unnecessary amount of products for capitalists, which required the help of advertising and a belief in current trends. This class of people hopes that children are never raised to become calm and reasonable consumers with little needs or luxuries, and in doing so they chose TV and other media as a tool for children's education. A passage in *America and Americans* allows us to reconsider the idea of mass consumption:

... we are also poisoned with things. Having many things seems to create a desire for more

things, more clothes, houses, automobiles. Think of the pure horror of our Christmases when our children tear open package after package and, when the floor is heaped with wrappings and presents, say, "Is that all?" And two days after, the smashed and abandoned "things" are added to our national trash pile, and perhaps the child, having got in trouble, explains, "I didn't have anything to do." And he means exactly that—nothing to do, nowhere to go, no direction, no purpose, and worst of all no needs. Wants he has, yes, but for more bright and breakable "things." We are trapped and entangled in things.

In my great-grandmother's time things were important. I know, because I have read her will, and the things she found important enough to bequeath by legal instrument we would have thrown away—such things as four pewter spoons, one broken in the handle, a square of black cotton lace. I had from Grandmama the little box of leaves from the Mount of Olives, a small bowl carved from one piece of onyx and beautiful to see, twelve books, and eight sheets of music. These were valuable things (*A & A* 139 - 140).

Reading this reminds us of our tendency to forget the importance and beauty of old and previously used products and things.

#### **b. Plastic**

Mass production has had a powerful effect on our souls. After taking in the situation that America was currently facing, Steinbeck remarked, "I protest the assembly-line production of our food, our songs, our language, and eventually our souls (*TC* 107)." Plastic seems to have been not only the incarnation of mass production but also a symbol of unnaturalness and lifelessness for the author. Steinbeck found such an experience appalling and depressing as he mentions in the following passage:

Not far outside of Bangor I stopped at an auto court and rented a room .... It was immaculate; everything was done in plastics—the floors, the curtain, table tops of stainless burnless plastic, lamp shades of plastic. Only the bedding and the towels were of a natural material. I went to the small restaurant run in conjunction. It was all plastic too—the table linen, the butter dish. The sugar and crackers were wrapped in cellophane (*TC* 45).

Steinbeck felt depressed when thinking about the dull waitress with "a sponge-off apron" who worked at the restaurant. From his description that, "[t]his vacant eye, listless hand, this damask cheek dusted like a doughnut with plastic powder (*TC* 46)," we can only imagine that this particular person was almost robot-like in appearance and carried out her duties in a mechanical manner. Steinbeck goes on to consider whether this particular waitress dreamt or was able to recall memories and he certainly couldn't enjoy any human interaction or conversation with her.

... this dame was one of them, who can drain off energy and joy, can suck pleasure dry and get no sustenance from it. Such people spread a grayness in the air about them. I'd been driving a long time, and perhaps my energy was low and my resistance down. She got me. I felt so blue and miserable. I wanted to crawl into a plastic cover and die (*TC 47*).

The author returned to his room, but all he found there was everything in its right place and overly clean with services that had been dehumanized. He couldn't even find a trace of human warmth in this situation.

In the bathroom two water tumblers were sealed in cellophane sacks with the words: "These glasses are sterilized for your protection." Across the toilet seat a strip of paper bore the message: "This seat has been sterilized with ultra - violet light for your protection." Everyone was protecting me and it was horrible. I tore the glasses from their covers. I violated the toilet - seat with my foot .... I was utterly miserable, and nothing was good anywhere (*TC 47*).

Steinbeck couldn't endure this lifeless place with "all that plastic," any longer. He felt like running away from a heartless world that, to him, was over hygienic and sterilized. After crumpling up "the sterile bed," he went out to sleep in Rocinante, his truck.

Steinbeck went on to humorously write that, "I began to formulate a new law describing the relationship of protection to despondency. A sad soul can kill you quicker, rat quicker, than a germ (*TC 48*)." Sadly, however, this statement can be applied to the new world of the 21st century in all seriousness. Today's youth seem to be enveloped in a hygienic world like that of the Steinbeck's hotel room, but the expressions we see on their faces often tell a different story of unhappiness and lifelessness. Who can be happy when surrounded with lifeless items of mass production that look just the same as any other item? How can the youth of today build up meaningful relationships with their surroundings that are just so disposable? There can be no argument that mass production and our own high levels of consumerism are casting a dark shadow on our spiritual life.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to "greed," Steinbeck mentioned "hatred and coldness" as other human "evil limbs (*Pearl 43*)." Although these sins are likely an ever present during any age of human history, the situation seems to be getting particularly worse in recent modern advanced society. In today's complex world that changes at an ever increasing speed, even factors that are related to human life are dealt with too mechanically and coldly. Those who swim against the tide are seen as annoying and are discriminated

against and excluded.

Large corporations and mass communication create meaningless trends in order to make the general public buy brand - new things one after another. Even in the 1960s, Steinbeck wrote that, "any night of television commercials can convince a plain and lonely girl that a hair rinse, along with false eyelashes and protuberances, can magically transform her into an exciting, magnetic sex kitten and guarantee her entrance into the garden of happiness (*A & A* 136)." Nowadays, the information industry makes people greedier, while the distribution of wealth is becoming increasingly unfair. The mass media reports on the life styles of the rich and famous, which can sometimes lead to feelings of revulsion among the mass of society and occasionally results in seemingly indiscriminate killing.

People living in this modern society all too easily regard themselves as losers or failures and live languid lives set against this background of excessive materialism. Too many people who despair of their future therefore feel resentful against those who have been successful. John Steinbeck, who received threat letters from strangers himself, believed John F. Kennedy had been assassinated because of this kind of deep jealousy.

The desire and will to spy on, to denounce, to threaten, and to punish, while not an American tendency, nevertheless inflames a goodly number of Americans .... they seem to believe that the blame for their own unhappiness lies in the nature of the society in which they live .... All such sickness of the soul must find a target to shoot at—and the targets are available in the happy, the successful, the efficient, and the recognized .... It is my firm belief that President Kennedy was murdered not for what he was but for what his murderer wasn't; a man with a beautiful and loving wife, a high position, and the respect and admiration of his countrymen could not be forgiven by a man who had failed in everything he had undertaken—his marriage, his politics, and his aching desire to be accepted and admired (*A & A* 88).

Recently this problem has become an issue in education. People who fail to get an appropriate education in their youth tend to be easily influenced by the mass media, with TV acting as their alternate parent. When these children grow up, however, they realize this substitute parent doesn't pay attention to his or her real life. Instead, they find that their heroes or heroines of the small screen are simply pets of the mass media, which can lead to a loss of desire among such people.

The influence of the mass media tends to impact our concentration on our real lives. Even when Steinbeck was alive, the author was able to notice this tendency.

The guardian of the lake was a lonely man, the more so because he had a wife. He showed me her picture in a plastic shield in his wallet, a prettyish blond girl trying her best to live up to the pictures in the magazines, a girl of products, home permanents, shampoos, rinses, skin

conditioners. She hated being out in what she called the Sticks, longed for the great and gracious life in Toledo or South Bend. Her only company was found in the shiny pages of Charm and Glamour .... After he drove away in his jeep I lived his life for him and it put a mist of despair on me (*TC* 112).

In the 21st century, more and more people are finding it increasingly difficult to notice what is really important to them. We fail to realize our own happiness because of an increasing virtual reality and the overwhelming amount of information that surrounds us. It could even be said that we are being cheated of a significant amount of our real lives.

Due to the modern world's excessive mechanization we also tend to forget about cooperating with others; we tend to now prefer convenient individualism and ever more severe competition. As a result, we have become more indifferent to others. A significant number of today's youth have come to hate communicating with other people and have the delusion that they can live in a kind of virtual reality or a shut - in existence that relies on IT machinery and technology. Young princes and princesses who are attended by technology often remain in a period of primary narcissism. Psychologically, they maintain a sense of Infantile Omnipotence and cannot bring themselves to compromise or interact with the world around them. When they are not given what they want, they become too easily frustrated and come to hate society. Some of them simply try to destroy themselves or the world around them.

As mentioned earlier, John Steinbeck intuitively recognized the birth of new social evils in the 1960s. In spite of his wise advice and predictions we continue to head in the wrong direction. Prior to searching for the right course to take in this context, I would like to turn to what Steinbeck truly loved and held dear as the subject of analysis in my next thesis.

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