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WE SHOULD BE LIKE WATER, CHOOSING THE LOWEST PLACE
WHICH ALL OTHERS AVOID: JOHN STEINBECK AS A
MODERN MESSENGER OF TAOISM

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
English Literature

by
Andrea Marie Hammock

December 2005

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ABSTRACT

John Steinbeck's Cannery Row, written in 1944, is virtually plotless, metaphorical, and interspersed with chapters that seem irrelevant. Due to rumors that the book was Communist propaganda, Steinbeck was blacklisted by the government and shunned by the residents of his hometown after publication of the book. Despite harsh criticism, Steinbeck offered no explanation for the controversial text. The objective for this thesis is to significantly develop and further investigate one of the proposed purposes of this unusual manuscript; this analytical inquiry should interest biographers, literary critics, and philosophers.

In his brief 1975 article "Cannery Row and the Tao Te Ching," Peter Lisca suggests that the novel is inspired by the ancient eastern philosophy of Taoism. No previous responses or inquiries into his hypothesis have been undertaken. Furthermore, since Cannery Row is a Taoist text, then the novel's recently discovered precursor The God in the Pipes must also be thematically Taoist. The discovery of this text, which encompasses facets of Taoism, provides further support for Lisca's original assertion about Cannery Row, while also providing a necessary clue

for determining which version of the Tao Teh Ching Steinbeck used to compose his Taoist stories.

This thesis provides the first comparative analysis of Steinbeck's Cannery Row with Taoism. Specifically, Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes are both modern American elucidations of Dwight Goddard's 1939 translation and interpretation of the Tao Teh Ching, titled Laotzu's Tao and Wu Wei. This thesis also provides the first developed literary analysis of any kind directed towards the text of The God in the Pipes.

My findings for this thesis include a discovery that Steinbeck uses his texts to transform the metaphorical language of the Tao Teh Ching into concrete images. Steinbeck both fictionalizes and modernizes the Taoist philosophy throughout both texts. His message seems to criticize materialism and greed in our modern society. Interestingly, his deviation from Taoism, however, encompasses a personal outcry against domesticity.

To my husband and parents.

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CHAPTER ONE

STUMBLING UPON THE DESIGN OF CANNERY ROW:

STEINBECK'S CHALLENGE TO CRITICS

John Steinbeck's intentions for Cannery Row have been debated by scholars, critics, and biographers since its initial publication in 1945. Kiyohiko Tsuboi accurately portrays most readers' reactions to the text when stating, "Cannery Row is a puzzler, a parable, a fantasy, a paradox, a morality play and an attack on the industrial society and civilizations" (115). The novel, consisting of thirty-two short vignettes, is difficult to explore from a purely biographical reading since Steinbeck, an author who usually commented freely about his writing and even wrote books about penning books, said little about Cannery Row. This mere action of seemingly intentional silence has continuously intrigued historians, biographers, critics, and me.

The story is a mingling of fact and fiction, coupling Steinbeck's imaginative storytelling with real events, places and people from his own home town in Monterey County, California. Many of the characters, places, and events in the text are factual. Still, many others are

purely fictional. It is "a creation of myth and nostalgia" while at the same time being a "sophisticated...expression" of "Steinbeck-Ricketts philosophy" (Benson 555).

It was characteristic of Steinbeck to blend reality and imagination with his own idealistic message. From the initial publication of Steinbeck's other major Monterey County text, East of Eden (1952), a story which shares much of its setting and style with that of Cannery Row, Steinbeck made it clear that the text was not only about his own ancestral history, but also a reenactment of various Biblical stories. "In fact, many Steinbeck texts...contain a central story which retells a classic" (Meyer 17). Thus, for years, biographical scholars have pondered whether Cannery Row also has a pervading philosophical doctrine that drives its plot. If East of Eden, in all of its similarity to Cannery Row, is loosely based upon Biblical accounts, it seemed reasonable to most that Cannery Row could also be based upon a religious or philosophical doctrine or belief. Yet, Steinbeck left few clues to this quandary.

In a letter to a friend dated September 27, 1944, Steinbeck writes, "I finished the book called Cannery Row. I don't know whether it's effective or not. It's written

on four levels and people can take what they can receive out of it" (Steinbeck, Letters 273). Brian Railsback wrote of the text in a chapter of the 2002 Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck, that "because of the unusual way that Steinbeck approaches the universe, he walks out of step with his contemporaries and ahead of the science that informed him. With his fellow investigator...Edward F. Ricketts, Steinbeck embraced the paradoxes and disorder of the world around him" (278). Unquestionably, Cannery Row goes against everything we are to value about the American Dream by criticizing the burdens that are placed upon us by careers, mortgage payments, children, etc. Instead, the story seems to suggest that true spiritual satisfaction comes only with the freedom of poverty, the splendor of doing nothing at all, and the ability to not only accept, but to be pleased with having no possessions, no status, and no aspirations.

Due to Cannery Row's bizarre Utopian elements, in which men who are poor and homeless by choice play the roles of spiritual geniuses and unorthodox heroes, Steinbeck was automatically accused of being a Communist, and the book was banned and burned in parts of the country. Steinbeck was essentially blacklisted after the creation of

this text, and the citizens of his hometown were appalled to have unknowingly played a role in Steinbeck's supposed propaganda (John Steinbeck). Thus, after a plethora of threats and harassment from his neighbors, including such events as having the gas to his home shut off and being denied the ability to rent an office to work in, he moved back to New York City (Benson 556-78). He would never again call California his home. When Steinbeck died in 1968, he had neither defended nor explained the meaning of Cannery Row. Steinbeck did not reveal, at least in writing, what the four levels of the text are, and this has been the source of scholarly debate for decades.

In his 1958 book The Wide World of John Steinbeck, Peter Lisca quotes Steinbeck as stating that "no critic yet has stumbled upon the design of [Cannery Row]" (208). This challenge set off a slew of interpretations. Most critics agree that Steinbeck's text is in response to his time as a war reporter. Jackson J. Benson argues that the text is "Steinbeck's war novel" even though "it doesn't mention war" (556). Yet in 1977, nineteen years after Steinbeck's challenge to the critics to find the design of his text, Benson responds to Steinbeck's call by pointing out that "still no magic key to the novel has been found, however,

and the reason, I suspect, is that no key of the sort that critics are inclined to look for actually exists" (13).

Yet, by 1977, it is my assertion that Peter Lisca had already unveiled the holy grail of his personal research, the magic key that would unlock one of the four intricate meanings of Cannery Row.

In 1975, Peter Lisca released a short article called "Cannery Row and the Tao Teh Ching," claiming that on one level, Cannery Row is similar to Laotzu's ancient philosophical text that teaches of the path to Taoist enlightenment via self-denial and humility. In part, according to Lisca, the secret to Steinbeck's challenge seems to lie in the fact that the text of Cannery Row is dedicated "to Ed Ricketts who knows why or should." Lisca provides an intriguing connection between Taoism and Cannery Row, making the assertion that the book was written on a Taoist level, not for the mass audience, but specifically for his best friend and cohort, Doctor Ed Ricketts because he "was much attracted to Taoism" (Lisca 24). Doctor Ed Ricketts is the inspiration for the character of Doc Ricketts in Cannery Row, and the book is dedicated to Ed Ricketts. Noboru Shimomura cites Ricketts as being "an enthusiastic believer" in all forms of

"Eastern philosophy" (119). Richard Astro accurately writes that "no analysis of Steinbeck's world-view, his philosophy of life, can proceed without a careful study of the life, work, and ideas of this remarkable human being [Edward Ricketts] who was Steinbeck's closest personal and intellectual companion" (4).

In fact, Astro, himself, briefly mentions Ricketts's enthrallment with Taoism and states that, because of this philosophy, Ricketts "confidently" sought only "the sweet brew of life" which may appear to most as "laziness" but is in fact "an extension of a whole lifestyle by a man who believed in the Chinese proverb 'wealth is nothing but manure'" (56). Like the man, Ed Ricketts, Doc and most of the other characters from Cannery Row denounce materialism and wealth in favor of quality time spent drinking and socializing.

Lisca points out that "like Cannery Row, the Tao Teh Ching was written in a time of brutal war and, in reaction to those conditions, presented a system of human values devoid of all those qualities that brought on that war" (24-5). Lisca provides a precise description of the American perception of Taoism, calling it:

[a rejection] of the desire for material goods,

fame, power, and even fixed or strong opinions - all of which result in violence. Instead, man is to cultivate simple physical enjoyments and the inner life. To be obscure is to be wise; to fail is to succeed. In human relations force defeats itself, and even laws are a form of violence. The moral life is one of inaction. These principles generally are throughout Cannery Row. (25)

While Lisca does not provide an abundance of textual parallels between the Tao Teh Ching and Cannery Row, he does assert that he believes Steinbeck used either the Lin Yutang 1942 translation or the Witter Bynner 1944 translation of Laotzu's text as his foundation for creating Cannery Row.

It was not until 2002 that Michael J. Meyer also connected the Steinbeck canon to the Tao Teh Ching by exploring the parallels between the Taoist text and Steinbeck's 1951, The Log from the Sea of Cortez. Meyer contends that since scholarship and biography have shown that "Tortilla Flat" reinterprets "the tales of King Arthur," "The Wayward Bus" retells "Everyman," "East of Eden" focuses on the "myth of Cain and Abel," "The Winter

of Our Discontent" encompasses "Shakespearean and Biblical themes" and "Of Mice and Men and The Grapes of Wrath both contain echoes [of] Greek mythology" it should not be "far-fetched to believe that [Steinbeck] also found an opportunity to rewrite or reinterpret some of the insights in Lao Tz[u]'s great masterwork." Meyer stresses that he believes elements of Taoism can be found "not only in Cannery Row, but into much of his later fiction and non-fiction as well" (117-18). While briefly discussing evidence of Taoism in Cannery Row, Meyer also asserts that he believes Steinbeck probably consulted the Bynner or Lin Yutang translations when writing both Cannery Row and the Log from the Sea of Cortez.

Although both Lisca and Meyer have presented substantial and important evidence that should have been influential to scholarship on Steinbeck, current research about Steinbeck and his work has shown that the intellectual world is not yet fully convinced that Taoism influenced Steinbeck's writing. To my knowledge, Meyer and Lisca have composed the only two short articles that focus on the connection between the Steinbeck canon and Laotzu's ancient philosophical text; however Noboru Shimomura does note that Steinbeck's writing contains "references and

allusions" (124) to Laotzu that signal Steinbeck's understanding of Taoism.

While the influence of Taoism in Steinbeck's works has not been fully addressed, a few Asian scholars have begun to argue that Steinbeck was greatly influenced by Eastern cultures. Hiroshi Kaname states that Steinbeck's texts often demonstrate "the traditional Japanese worldview, teikan (resignation)" where a fully contented person accepts "everything as it is -- including death, loneliness and poverty" (101). Noburu Simomura explains that Steinbeck's writings are often akin to Eastern concepts of peace-keeping by being "opposed" to those attributes which "lead to war," such as the "acquisit[ion] of profit," by advocating "the primitive life" (132-33). Despite the recent surge of interest in the impact that Asian culture had on Steinbeck's writing, a thorough textual comparative analysis of the parallels between the Tao Teh Ching and Cannery Row, or any other Steinbeck work, has never been conducted.

To fully investigate Steinbeck's use of Taoism in his writing, this textual analysis of the parallels between Steinbeck's work and the Tao Teh Ching is in order. Since each translation of the Tao Teh Ching differs immensely

from one another, it is imperative to establish which translation Steinbeck used when writing Cannery Row. The original text, which was written in China approximately 2,500 years ago, has been translated into English more times than any other Chinese document. Since the doctrine itself is seen variously as a religious document, a philosophical way of living, a guide for alchemy, a methodological approach to winning a war, and an instruction manual for government leaders, each translation boasts its own message and interpretation:

The verses of the Tao Teh Ching are written in ancient Chinese, which is very different from English. Abstraction and logic are not distinguishing marks of the ancient Chinese language, hence, it is less rigid than English and there are very few formal or grammatical structures. The classical Chinese word does not stand for a single concrete idea, but it evokes associations of different ideas and things...It is almost impossible to render an ancient Chinese text properly. Different translations of the Tao Teh Ching may appear as completely different texts. (Knierim)

In fact, the translations of the text differ so dramatically, that while some are written as prose, many are written in poetic form. Each translator has the liberty to incorporate what she or he believes to be the underlying message of the text; thus the imagery and characteristics of the various English translations can be overwhelmingly discrepant.

While certainly the Bynner and Lin Yutang translations were highly reputable texts from the 1940's, and I will not question that Steinbeck studied them, I will argue that Steinbeck consulted an earlier translation when composing Cannery Row. It seems, instead, that Steinbeck used the 1939 Dwight Goddard translation titled Laotzu's Tao and Wu Wei, which also includes a selection called "Interpretive Essays" by Henri Borel. The primary reason for my contention is that in 1995, Roy Simmonds released an article in San Jose State University's The Steinbeck Newsletter, briefly discussing a newly discovered, unfinished and unpublished work by Steinbeck, The God in the Pipes. This text, written in 1939, is very similar in plot and theme to Cannery Row, and in fact, Simmonds argues that it is similar enough in both style and theme to be called "an early version of Cannery Row" (1). Although

only seven and one quarter pages have been recovered of this text, I will argue that it clearly encompasses many of the same Taoist elements as Cannery Row. Simmonds argues, "the fragment, tantalizing in its brevity and incompleteness, has special significance to the Steinbeck canon. While not part of Cannery Row, it is a precursor of that novel and several elements in the fragment re-appear in Cannery Row" (3). Simmonds closes with a provoking excerpt from a letter written by Steinbeck in October of 1939:

I must make a new start.. I've worked the novel [The God in the Pipes] I know as far as I can take it. I never did think much of it - a clumsy vehicle at best. And I don't know the form of the new but I know there is a new which will be adequate and shaped by this new thinking.

Anyway, there is a picture of my confusion.

(qtd. in Simmonds 3)

Simmonds's short, three page article is then followed by a transcript of the unpublished text of The God in the Pipes. To date, no further scholarship has been published about this previously lost piece of the Steinbeck canon.

Simmonds's discovery of this new text lends insight

into Meyer and Lisca's assertion that Cannery Row is, at least partially, Taoist in theme. First, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, The God in the Pipes encompasses many of the same Taoist messages as Cannery Row, thus adding yet another Taoist thread to the Steinbeck canon. Simmonds writes that the text is a "comment on the absurdity of so-called riches, the obsessive desire to be seen as superior to one's neighbors, the envy for others' possessions" (3). Indeed, this statement could accurately be made about the Tao Teh Ching, itself. Furthermore, if, as Lisca, Meyer, and now I assert, Steinbeck was influenced by Laotzu's text in at least three works, it is possible that Taoism was a larger inspiration to his creations than what was originally believed. Finally, the mysterious text provides another clue in determining which translation of the Tao Teh Ching Steinbeck may have used to compose Cannery Row. Since Steinbeck abandoned The God in the Pipes in 1940, it would have been impossible for his initial interest in Taoism to have generated with the 1942 Lin Yutang translation or the 1944 Bynner translation. Clearly, Steinbeck's interest in Taoism must have surfaced at least by 1940.

After discovering Simmonds's article and the lost text

of The God in the Pipes, I became interested in ascertaining which translation of the Tao Teh Ching Steinbeck must have used when writing Cannery Row and its precursor. This inquiry lead me to Robert J. DeMott's Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed. According to DeMott's work, Ed Ricketts owned, and thus Steinbeck most certainly read, the Dwight Goddard translation of the Tao Teh Ching. DeMott does not mention that Steinbeck had read the Yutang or Bynner translations. As I will show, definite textual similarities can be found between Goddard's translation, The God in the Pipes, and Cannery Row. These parallels of writing are not, however, as clearly evident between Steinbeck's work and the Yutang or Bynner translations. Thus, it is my hope that this discovery and my analyses will provide the precise and definite textual congruencies between the Steinbeck canon and Taoism to allow for further research into the philosophy as a motivation for much of Steinbeck's writing.

It is my belief that when Steinbeck wrote that The God in the Pipes was "a picture of [his] confusion" that he meant that it was "clumsy" at portraying the themes of Taoism he had hoped to present. Taoism is contradictory, metaphorical, and not easy to grasp. Undoubtedly, Cannery

Row does function more adequately and accurately as a picture of Taoism than the few remaining pages of its precursor. Certainly, studying Taoism takes time. It is reasonable to postulate that Steinbeck would have felt that he had a better understanding of the Tao Teh Ching when he wrote Cannery Row than when he attempted to write The God in the Pipes, which must have been composed immediately after encountering Goddard's translation. Later, when Steinbeck wrote that Cannery Row was "written on four levels," it is my belief that on one level the text is indicative of a modern day interpretation of Taoism. Specifically, Steinbeck seems to revel in taking the highly metaphorical messages displayed in Laotzu's work and transforming them into concrete images and parts of his story.

I will not, specifically, attempt to discern why Steinbeck may have been inspired to write Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes as Taoist texts. It is probable that Ricketts's fascination with Taoism fueled Steinbeck's eagerness to write a Taoist text. This may explain the cryptic dedication of the text: "To Ed Ricketts who knows why or should." Furthermore, I agree with Benson who argues that Cannery Row was "born out of [Steinbeck's]

discovery in war of his own mortality" (555). Undoubtedly, the war was disturbing to Steinbeck, and perhaps this is, itself, evidence for why he turned to Taoism, a philosophy of peace. While no evidence suggests that Steinbeck himself lived as a Taoist, Meyer proposes that components of Taoism may have interested Steinbeck because he "feared that wealth and success would cause his artistic failure as an author" (118). Steinbeck admittedly enjoyed getting "special treatment...But at the same time, he had a deep-seated feeling that there was something wrong, something corrupting about such pleasure" (Benson 546). In fact, evidence suggests that through much of Steinbeck's life, he disparaged his own financial achievements.

My examination will encompass a detailed textual analysis of the distinct parallels between Steinbeck's Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes with Dwight Goddard's translation of Laotzu's Tao Teh Ching titled Laotzu's Tao and Wu Wei. I will also illustrate textual congruencies that will demonstrate why I believe that the additional component of this particular translation, Henri Borel's "Interpretive Essays," aided Steinbeck's understanding of Taoism.

Specifically, I will discuss Steinbeck's

transformation of Laotzu's conceptual and figurative Taoist language and ideas into tangible and literal constituents to be used in his own modern texts. In essence, this exploration will not only demonstrate Steinbeck's usage and apparent understanding of the philosophy of Taoism, but will also show that the works themselves are unique and fascinating elucidations of Laotzu's work. A tradition in Taoist studies, dating back to the Taoist story-teller Chang Tzu (approximately fourth century, B.C.), is for the interpreter to explain the complex philosophy via a story rather than relate what she or he believes the literal translation to be. This trend continues in our modern era. For example, two widely read popular texts by Benjamin Hoff The Tao of Pooh (1982) and The Te of Piglet (1992) do not attempt to directly translate the Tao Teh Ching, but rather they show through stories how the philosophy works. The same can be said of the widely accepted novel Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (1974) by Robert M. Pirsig, which is a story that teaches the morality of Zen, a philosophy which couples Taoism and Buddhism. These popular texts have helped to explain the tenets of Taoism to a curious western society. Although Steinbeck cloaked the Taoist nature of his own works, they could none the

less be studied as early archetypes of an American author encompassing this "show instead of tell" practice in Taoist writing. Thus, while it is my hope that this research will excite further inquiry into Steinbeck's study of Taoism as a potential worldview and motivation for story telling, it is also my belief that Cannery Row could be of interest to Taoist, religious, and philosophical scholars.

CHAPTER TWO

"A CONSUMMATE WORDLESS TEACHER":

MR. BOSS AND DOC RICKETTS AS TAOIST LEADERS

Although the Tao Teh Ching has often been examined as a guide to living, a philosophical text, or a religious icon, it is generally believed that one of Laotzu's fundamental intentions was to teach people how to become better leaders. In fact, the text seems to offer a substantial amount of guidance to one who wishes to perfect his or her ability to rule in a righteous and fair way; therefore, the text is often studied in both government and rhetoric courses. In Steinbeck's The God in the Pipes and Cannery Row, an eclectic mix of several elements of Taoism is evident, but in particular, Steinbeck seems to have focused on leadership, lowliness, and lessons in patience and humility.

As a foundation, Steinbeck creates two fictional worlds where leadership is unique, yet certainly evident. Laotzu writes of government and royalty, both of which are wholly non-existent in Steinbeck's two communities of bums and denizens who show no regard for laws, policies, or social codes. Yet, within each of the stories, Steinbeck

does have a strong and clear leader emerge, thus modernizing Laotzu's ancient philosophy. Doc Ricketts from Cannery Row and Mr. Boss from The God in the Pipes demonstrate similar elements of Taoist leadership, and by doing so, Laotzu's complex metaphorical images of what a leader should be are transformed by Steinbeck into tangible, realistic characters. The descriptions and implied characteristics of both Mr. Boss and Doc seem to strive to answer the questions: How could a Taoist leader emerge in a money-oriented society? How can happiness and poverty coexist? The non-obtrusive guidance of these leaders, in fact, seems to set the precedence for the actions of their followers, and thus, these two leaders seem to be the primary contributors to the Taoist lifestyles evident within the unconventional, modest communities.

The incomplete text of The God in the Pipes, in short, is a story about a population of people who live in abandoned water pipes in Monterey, California. Mr. Boss's allegorical name is misleading; whereas Mr. Boss is indeed a leader, he cannot be a "boss" since his followers are homeless families and bums. The story begins when Cameron, a wandering homeless visitor from Salinas, California,

visits the pipe town in hopes of viewing Mr. Boss's secret possession, a champagne bottle. When Mr. Boss finds out that Cameron possesses a gun that was left to him by his father, the imagery of the text changes. The short story, which begins on a light note, shifts in the final two pages. Although the text is too short and incomplete for me to speculate on how it might have ended, the darkness in the imagery of the final paragraphs suggests that Cameron's obsession with Mr. Boss's bottle, mirrored by Mr. Boss's striking admiration of Cameron's gun, was going to have caused chaos and disorder within this seemingly utopian community of homeless people.

The text is rough, unrevised, and doesn't contain the beauty and introspection we are used to seeing in Steinbeck's work. The leadership capabilities of Mr. Boss as a Taoist leader are miniscule in comparison to Doc. Rather, Mr. Boss seems to serve as an early, rough, and underdeveloped practice character for Steinbeck's true Taoist leader, Doctor Ed Ricketts from Cannery Row. Mr. Boss does not possess the undeniable, blatantly Taoist elements of leadership as Steinbeck would later assign to the character of Doc. His followers do not function as effectively as Taoists. His lifestyle is not as clearly

Taoist as Docs. Yet, certainly Mr. Boss does try to be righteous, honest and certainly holds his people in the highest regard.

If, as I believe, The God in the Pipes was to have been a demonstration of a potentially Taoist community gone temporarily off course, and ultimately a warning to Steinbeck's readers about the potential devastation of doing away with commonness, simplicity and modesty, then this philosophy begins with Mr. Boss. When he exudes goodness, his people follow his ways. When he becomes greedy, we can see that his citizens follow this trait as well. From the beginning of Steinbeck's unfinished text, one can see the regard that the citizens hold for Mr. Boss. When Cameron arrives in Monterey, he immediately asks Joe, the first person he encounters, how he can find a way to cast his eyes upon the champagne bottle. Joe informs Cameron that he will never be able to see it, because Mr. Boss does not reveal it to strangers. With this information, Cameron decides he must become a part of the community, with the hopes that one day he, too, will be allowed to view the token of his grail, the bottle. When he asks Joe where he can find Mr. Boss so that he can rent a pipe to live in, Joe is astonished that he would ask such a

question. "One does not knock on Mr. Boss's door," Joe scolds. "It isn't done. Would you go up to Buckingham and knock? No, it isn't that simple" (5). While this seems, at first, to demonstrate a distance between Mr. Boss and his community, the reader soon realizes that this is not the case. Mr. Boss has a commendable relationship with his motley group of bums and hobos, as both the community and Mr. Boss exemplify mutual respect towards one another. Thus, that Joe compares his leader, Mr. Boss, to the royalty of England is, in actuality, a compliment to his respectable qualities but not a sign of social distance.

During Cameron's first morning in the town of pipe homes, he notices that the people assemble to greet Mr. Boss upon his departure from his own 'boiler room' home. Steinbeck writes:

Every head turned to look at him, but he stood quietly gazing down over the pipes, smiling a little at his people. And at last he moved down the path and the people greeted him and he returned their greetings graciously. (5)

Cameron immediately notices that the respect for Mr. Boss is undeniable, and all of the people in the impoverished community seem to hold him in highest regard. In fact, the

treatment of Mr. Boss seems almost regal as he descends each morning to find his people lovingly waiting for him to come down from his metaphorical palace, the abandoned boiler he calls home. Laotzu teaches in the Tao Teh Ching that "[a] great ruler...should keep in close touch with [his people] and...he should give reason for them to respect his moral earnestness" (34).

Since the text of The God in the Pipes is incomplete, we know very little of what Mr. Boss has done to merit such respect from his citizens. In fact, the majority of any modern audience would likely be mystified as to why these people of the pipes would be content and happy, not only with their leader, but with their lives in general. Their existence seems most unsatisfactory, as they live in cramped, abandoned metal pipes, and even the most fortunate only possess "two boxes to sit on and some bedding" (8). Yet Laotzu specifically instructs one who is in touch with the Tao to "not be troubled because of the narrowness of your dwelling, do not become depressed because of the life you are compelled to live. If people cease to worry about their surroundings and their lives, their minds will become tranquil" (65). The pipe dwellers live in a world where, if "they want something," even "a piece of iron or a

carriage full of bones, they must go about sweating, planning, working...And even then, sometimes they don't get them" (9). And yet, unquestionably, they are happy with what they have, with their lives, and in particular, they are pleased with their leader. To the modern reader, this is undoubtedly a conundrum and dilemma since members of our society typically value status, monetary possessions, and the 'American Dream' of home ownership and successful careers.

Laotzu teaches that a good leader wants little, and thus his people will also desire little. A good leader cannot have wealth and possessions, according to Taoist thought, because then, his or her people will want these luxuries too. In fact, a leader should act just as he or she wants the people to, since they will typically strive to emulate a leader that is considered good. It is evident that Mr. Boss's citizens hold him in such high esteem that when they are in his company, they "made their faces look as much like his as they could" (6). When Laotzu writes that citizens will mock a leader, he seems to suggest they will follow the morals and actions of their leader. Steinbeck transforms this into a simplified, tangible image when Mr. Boss's followers literally attempt to look as he

does. Additionally, because Mr. Boss does not desire riches or wealth, his people likewise feel content with their lack of possessions.

Taoism teaches that a leader's "administration" should be "designed to remove the desires of his people. He supplies them only with suitable nourishment and lessens their individual ideas by strengthening the common health. He ever strives to keep his people in ignorance and desirelessness" (27). Ultimately, Steinbeck never declares that the people of Mr. Boss's shantytown are ignorant, but their simple-minded ways are shown through their actions. Each morning, when they hear the cannery whistle that announces to the nearby workers that it is time to begin the work-day, the pipe dwellers pay their respects to the sound, the coming of a new day, or, perhaps, to the cannery itself. "At the sound the men stood up and faced the cannery and removed their hats and the women turned toward the cannery and bowed and even the children made their duty" (5). It is explained to Cameron that he, too, should pay respect to the whistle because "[i]t is better to follow the custom. It does you no harm. We have our generations and surely they are good because we have had them a long time" (5). While the inability or lack of

desire to change is often an attribute that is disparaged in our modern world, this is not the case with Taoism.

Laotzu writes, "let people return to the spirit of the olden day" and thus "rejoice in their customs" (68).

Laotzu does not specify which "customs" are appropriate, so Steinbeck uses this as an opportunity to demonstrate an almost amusing description of the entire community forming to pay a seemingly ignorant tribute to a cannery whistle.

These images of togetherness and unity are juxtaposed with the darker images that appear in the final section of The God in the Pipes. The despondency in the text suggests that Steinbeck may have planned a change to occur within Mr. Boss, and thus his pipe village. This change may have involved a movement away from Taoism and toward the complex world of needing and wanting better and more possessions. Undoubtedly, this lapse in Taoist following was going to be a lesson in morality for the reader. That Mr. Boss holds in his possession a beautiful champagne bottle might have, itself, become his downfall. Or when he acquires Cameron's antique gun, this may have been the initiation of his ruin as a Taoist leader. Possibly, Steinbeck was going to have these lowly people complete a circle by eventually returning to happiness, simplicity and spiritual prosperity

and, thus, Mr. Boss would, in due course, remain a leader of Taoist principles.

One point that is evident, despite the frustrations of the incomplete text, is that we, as readers, are supposed to see that Mr. Boss owns very little, and despite this fact, his people admire and respect him. Laotzu writes that a good leader will demonstrate to his people that every thing, every item is usable and thus "nothing is useless" (39). Again, Steinbeck takes this concept to a tremendous limit, doing away with all metaphorical ideas of what may be meant by the statement "nothing is useless," and creating, instead, a literal image as Mr. Boss and his people live in squalor, making homes and seeing value in items that are nothing more than trash and garbage. Thus, an empty champagne bottle is a treasure, and an abandoned water pipe is a lavish home.

Ultimately, the perfect Taoist leader is one who is, according to Laotzu, "always concerned about the welfare of people and, indeed, it is for their sake alone that his mind is burdened...he regards them as his children" (53). This quality is almost identically mirrored in the character of Mr. Boss, who admits to Cameron that "at night" he sits and worries about his "own people" (5). To

a Taoist, worry and grief is typically unnecessary and the symbol of a weak mind because the world cannot be changed, and it is inevitable that a life must be filled with both good and bad. However, Laotzu does contend that it is natural and even good for a leader to worry about the welfare of his people just as a mother worries about her children. Therefore, it seems no mere coincidence that the one thing which keeps Mr. Boss awake at night is not his possessions, but the well-being of his people.

Yet, for Mr. Boss, this ability to see value in all things and to ignore the desire for material goods does begin to falter towards the end of Steinbeck's text. This happens when his wife points out to him that their trash is not as good as the trash that is in the possession of a neighboring community who live by a dump. Although Mr. Boss seems to have little desire to acquire more possessions and wealth for his people, his wife, Mrs. Boss is quite discontent with her own life after having witnessed the Dump People. She informs Mr. Boss that in a nearby village people are living in luxury. These inhabitants have trucks come up and leave treasures on their front steps. Mrs. Boss, desperately envious, describes to her husband:

Here's what I saw come out of one truck load.

Two stove lids, eighteen bottles, a part roll of chicken wire, a bed springs, three five gallon cans, a half bucket of green paint, the entire skeleton of a horse, six gunny sacks and enough tin cans to fill this room. (9)

As Steinbeck probes the reader, as is often his way, to question the absurdity of the possessions he or she covets (fine cars, fancy wines, flamboyant jewels, or perhaps some other equally non-essential item), the reader simultaneously witnesses a stark transformation in Mrs. Boss. At first, she is content with her life, as she is fantastically ignorant of the fact that her life is not as prosperous as her neighbors'. Once this "ignorance" of her own poverty is diminished, she fully abandons the concept of "desirelessness." Laotzu teaches that if a community is based only on simplicity and a lack of knowledge, "they will take delight in simple food, be proud of their cheap clothes, content with their dwellings, and rejoice in their customs" (68). This is how Mrs. Boss used to be, but no longer can she return to this state of simplicity. In fact, she becomes outraged and belligerent as she becomes more jealous of the Dump People, stating that they "aren't

worthy" because they are "foreigners" and "their culture is degenerate" (9). Mrs. Boss, a moral woman who is typically kind in nature, has become resentful to the point of being acrimonious. Her longing for material wealth has made her become judgmental and even racist.

In part, the Dump People seem to serve as a direct contrast to the pipe dwellers as it is evident that the Dump People do not possess such child-like enthusiasm about their items, even though they own much nicer things than the people who live in the pipes. Mr. Boss leads a moral and strong community of citizens who are impressed by even the slightest prize or possession. They are proud of their unfurnished pipe homes. They take joy and satisfaction in occasionally seeing Mr. Boss's bottle, but do not care to own such possessions themselves because Mr. Boss does not make them feel insignificant for not owning nice items. Yet, Mrs. Boss describes that when the dump truck arrived with a new load of treasures, the Dump People:

were so languid, so la de dah - they picked them over as though they were tired of wealth. Threw away a can because it had a hole in it... "Oh no, couldn't take this - why it has a hole in it. Throw it away." (9)

Mrs. Boss continues to try to persuade Mr. Boss that something must be done so that she, too, can have the possessions of the Dump People. She wants him to do all that he can so that she, and the other pipe dwellers, can have the freedom to throw away a can only because "it has a hole in it." When, at first, he refuses to visit the dump dwellers, she scolds and hurts him by saying "Look Howard, I married you because I thought you were a man" (9). When this insult to his masculinity seems to have little impact upon Howard Boss, she warns him that he will feel differently once he sees the Dump People "sitting among their splendid things" (9). She continues, lashing out with a final blow to his pride, "You have a champagne bottle - why to them a champagne bottle is dirt" (9).

Mr. Boss initially knows nothing of the Dump People, and this ignorance helps him to be a better leader, a better Taoist. Because he does not know his existence is meager, his community feels no shame for how they live either. At this point, Steinbeck's text abruptly ends, and we can only speculate as to Mr. Boss's response to his wife's cold words and their newly acquired knowledge of the community by the dump.

Mr. Boss, who quite possibly loves his champagne bottle and Cameron's gun too much, might have failed as a perfect Taoist leader. Steinbeck may have intended for Mr. Boss to become a modern example of what Laotzu describes as "emperors...who, recklessly ambitious for power, have grasped after riches and thereby have lost control of their empires" (39). Doc Ricketts from the Row, on the other hand, is seemingly perfect in almost all aspects of his leadership, and his Taoist morals are virtually unfaltering throughout the entirety of Cannery Row. Like Mr. Boss, Doc is the most esteemed person in the entire text, and his Taoist leadership is evident from the beginning of the story as Steinbeck portrays him as a man who:

has the hands of a brain surgeon and a cool warm mind. He tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and dogs look up and smile at him. He can kill anything for need but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure...He [is] the fountain of philosophy and science and art...Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon - his sympathy had no warp...He lived in a world of wonders, of excitement. (29)

This man, with his cool warm mind, undoubtedly parallels Laotzu's perfect Taoist leader whose "wisdom never fails" whose "potentiality is never exhausted" and who realizes that to be in control, one must know both coldness and heat, because, ultimately "[m]otion conquers cold, while quietness conquers heat" (51). Attempting to understand the paradoxical qualities of Taoism is beyond the scope of my abilities, for only the finest Taoist sages ever fully understand the "way" to Taoism. But it seems, most certainly, that Steinbeck is attempting to emulate Laotzu by having the character of Doc, based on his own best friend Ed Ricketts, possess the same contradictory qualities as a Taoist sage.

Lisca, himself, provides the connection between the character of Doc Ricketts and a Taoist sage, by pointing out that Doc "is a consummate wordless teacher to the entire community. In listening seriously to Mack's schemes or Henri's illusion, he illustrates the Taoist principal that by not believing people, you turn them into liars" (25). Laotzu provides instructions for how to be a Taoist teacher, a perfect sage, but Steinbeck teaches this concept in a different way by not explaining or preaching, but rather by showing.

In some instances, the inconspicuously grandiose character of Doc almost seems to possess supernatural abilities; always these talents are in some way related to nature. Doc Ricketts refuses to own a clock. In fact, both the character and the man, Ed Ricketts, had a special gift for "feeling" the time, and each man could, as it has been said, feel a tide change in his sleep. "In his study of the tide pool or even a stinkbug, he conforms to the Taoist precept that one should look to Nature to know oneself, one's real human nature" (Lisca 26). Certainly, to accept and feel at one with nature is a Taoist quality, but Doc takes this philosophy to a new height when it becomes obvious to the reader that "he is at one with his total environment - including the whorehouse, Lee Chong's, the Palace Flophouse - and thus in communion with the harmonious balance of the Tao" (Lisca 26).

Doc is certainly the fountain of all wisdom within the set apart world of Cannery Row, but one immediately notices that he does not show off his enlightenment. Rather, he teaches his ideologies, more often than not, through simple words or even silence. When Mack tries to con Doc out of a buck by "giv[ing] him a hell of a story," Doc doesn't need to say anything at all to Mack. By the

mere look on Doc's face, that shows that "he knew God damn well the story was so much malarkey," Mack feels so ashamed of his actions that he admits, "Doc, that's a fuggin' lie!" The lesson continues as Doc calmly hands Mack a dollar and tells him that he figures "a guy that needs it bad enough to make up a lie to get it, really needs it" (81). This is how Doc teaches, and for Mack, the lesson works. He feels so ashamed at having attempted to take advantage of Doc that he returns the dollar to him the very next day. "I never did spend it," Mack admits. "Just kept it overnight and then gave it back to him" (81). In his actions, Doc actually becomes Tao. Laotzu writes, "Tao is invisible, but permeates everywhere; no matter how one uses it...it is never exhausted." Tao "in quiet confidence," is the "unfailing source of all things." Tao keeps hidden its "wits and competencies" and is free from "worldly entanglements." And one who is, essentially, one with Tao, would always strive to keep in "humility and courtesy" (27).

Tao, then, though a metaphorical idea, is come to life with Steinbeck's depiction of Doc. Like the idea of Tao, which is said to permeate and be the center of all things in the universe, Doc permeates and is the center of all

people and actions within the micro-universe of the Row. The separate snapshots of the Row which comprise Cannery Row are thematically connected via the character of Doc. As Laotzu instructs, "Whatever he does is done in harmony with the principle of Tao" (26). Just as Jesus, through his actions, "is" Christianity, Doc Ricketts, at least as a fictional character in Steinbeck's story, "is" Taoism. And much like Christianity, where the Biblical stories teach the religion, Steinbeck's Doc teaches the philosophy of Taoism to the common population. Thus, Doc works as a lesson in Taoism in a way that the Tao Teh Ching and The God in the Pipes does not. Laotzu's text tells how to become sage-like, but does not show an example of this. One could, perhaps, strive to follow Laotzu's strict instructions of how to be a Taoist sage, but the task seems overbearing and even impossible in a modern world. How does one be like water? How does one possess the qualities of both cold and hot? How does one strive to be wise and ignorant, simultaneously? The task seems daunting. Yet, with Steinbeck's character, Doc, the principles of Taoism appear easy. Do all things with kindness and love, do not worship material possessions, be helpful, wise, and humble.

explains that he isn't in school because they "don't want [him] there," and when Doc calls the school to confirm this, it is true. The school explains that the boy "couldn't learn and there was something a little wrong with his coordination." As Frankie returns to the laboratory day after day, silently watching and helping Doc without getting in his way, Doc eventually asks, "Why do you come here?" to which Frankie replies, "Because you don't hit me or give me a nickel" and explains that all of his 'uncles' as his mother calls them, either "hit [him] and tell [him] to get out" or "give [him] a nickel and tell [him] to get out" (58).

Doc's relationship with Frankie shows a concrete and memorable image of what Laotzu teaches about finding value in that which at first seems worthless. Though he and the boy rarely talk, he finds little odd jobs to give the boy something to do with his time. The boy constantly breaks things, he is unable to sweep the floor properly, and cannot even be taught to pour a beer correctly. But Doc continues to try to teach the boy, despite his apparent inability to be trained. He eventually learns "to light Doc's cigars and he wanted Doc to smoke all of the time so he could light his cigar" (59). One evening at a party,

Doc praises Frankie in front of his guests, by saying "Yes, Frankie is a great help to me." What follows is a moment of splendour for Frankie as he repeats the instance to himself over and over again:

Frankie couldn't forget that. He did the thing in his mind over and over...and Doc - "a great help to me - Frankie is a great help to me - Sure Frankie is a great help - Frankie," and Oh my God! (60)

Here, we can visualize what Steinbeck meant when he said that his new version of The God in the Pipes would work in a way that the original did not. That Mr. Boss finds value in trash is interesting, at best. But the shared moment between Doc and Frankie in Cannery Row makes a statement about the effects of altruism.

Yet, "in spite of his friendliness and friends Doc was a lonely and set apart man" (100). This statement, while seemingly contradictory, is yet another hint at Taoist thought, as described in Borel's essay. The Sage of Shein Shan, also known as the Hermit, explains that one who is totally and completely immersed into Taoism and at one with Tao "will know as little of [friendship and love] as the stream knows of its banks when it is lost in the endless

ocean" (Borel 91). The direct teachings of Laotzu instruct, of course, that one should not value anything. For advanced practitioners of Taoism, hermits and sages, this eventually means that one should learn not to value his or her own friendships, body, or life. Sage Shein Shan declares, "Life is cold and empty...There is, in fact, no such thing as life; it is unreal" (Borel 91). Laotzu writes, "I seem to stand in contrast to common people [because I seem to them] empty..., but I am nourished by food from...Tao" (36). Doc, who seems alone despite his abundance of friends, becomes a modern example of the well-respected, even adored hermit of ancient Chinese myth and folklore, the bearer of a soul which is so humble that it seems to transcend judgments.

And just as Doc is never judged for his humble ways, neither does Doc judge the actions of those around him. "Doc never locked the laboratory: He went on the theory that anyone who wanted to break in could easily do it, that people were essentially honest and that, finally, there wasn't much the average person would want to steal there anyway" (124). While technically it was true that thieves did not steal from Doc, "[h]is theory...had been completely ineffective regarding his friends. Books were often

'borrowed'. No can of beans ever survived his absence and on several occasions, returning late, he had found guests in his bed" (124). Doc does not value his own possessions, and therefore when they are "borrowed" it is no great loss to him. He does not allow the damages to his own personal property to burden his mind. "If he would have his people keep away from robbery and theft," Laotzu instructs, "he should not value precious things himself. If he would keep his mind undisturbed he should not look at desirable things" (26). In small ways, even by Doc not locking his laboratory doors, Steinbeck shows Taoism. The story, while seemingly about virtually nothing, ironically takes on a story of its own that teaches a philosophy that is almost as old as written history.

Cannery Row may work as a documentary of Taoist principle, in fact, because the main character, and the fundamental epitome of Taoist thought, Doc, is in fact based upon the real person, Ed Ricketts. The real man inspired Steinbeck to strive for a philosophical foundation just as Doc teaches the characters of Cannery Row to do the same:

As Richard Astro writes regarding Ed Ricketts's philosophical influence on Steinbeck, Ricketts

hoped that his friend would reach a plateau where the ultimate and best writers discover "there is no right and wrong, all things are 'right,' including both right and wrong;...Eventually he will also "attain a 'creative synthesis,' an 'emergent viewpoint' as [he lives] into the whole and know[s] that 'it's right, it's alright,' the 'good,' the 'bad,' whatever is." (qtd. in Meyer 120)

Cannery Row, a story with no controlling plot, is none the less read by and understood by more American readers than books re-telling the fundamentals of Taoist philosophies. Steinbeck takes the philosophies of Laotzu, beautiful but complex, and merges them with the teachings of Ed Ricketts, simple but scientific. Together, they form a first attempt at a Taoist text, a failure, The God in the Pipes, but a second attempt at a Taoist text, which we know as Cannery Row, and though it is not recognized as Taoist, that text spurs a passion for an unnamed philosophy within its characters, and thus its readers, that is undoubtedly, albeit unbeknownst, inspired by Taoism.

CHAPTER THREE

"BE LIKE WATER":

STEINBECK'S BUMS AS TAOISTS

The success of a Taoist leader can only be measured by looking at the morality of that leader's followers. In both Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes, the followers are not Taoist monks or sages. Instead, within each story, the followers of Doc and Mr. Boss, and thus the followers of Taoism, are bums, homeless men and women, the unemployed, the lazy, the social outcasts. This picture of the moral bum or the philosophically brilliant hobo asks us, as readers, to automatically set aside any preconceived western notions of homelessness that we may have. And once we have done this, perhaps Steinbeck hoped that the notions and philosophies of Taoism would, as Steinbeck hoped the stories of the Row would do, "crawl in by themselves" (3).

In his study of the parallels between Cannery Row and Taoism, Peter Lisca asserts that John Steinbeck demonstrates through the characters of the impoverished Mack and the boys, "a philosophically based and impassioned celebration of values directly opposed to those dominant in Western society" (22). What makes Steinbeck's depiction of

the Row such an idealized place, even "pastoral" (22), is that the characters do not possess or seek "the kind of evil men bring upon themselves" (Lisca 26). Although Lisca is the only critic to fully express that Mack and the boys possess Taoist qualities, the simplicity and integrity of the men has often been praised by critics and scholars. Christina Sheenan Gold declares that Steinbeck's novels "showcased a tradition of homeless advocacy and empathy that would remain firmly entrenched in the American consciousness" (65). Hiroshi Kaname applauds Mack and the boys, citing that they seem to follow the Japanese tradition of "teikan" or "accepting what actually is," and they "live as they want" and "are proud to be non-materialistic and socially isolated" (106). In both Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes, Steinbeck creates a world that seems idealistic, almost utopian. Yet, the irony is that this world is based upon the lives of homeless people, mere inhabitants who have become outcasts in a society that neither understands them, nor cares to.

The impecunious scoundrels, the lowly, the men and women who seek neither fame nor glory are the most valued citizens according to Taoist philosophy. In the Bhikshu Wai-Tao and Dwight Goddard translation of Tao Teh Ching,

the version that John Steinbeck, most likely studied, Laotzu states that "the highest virtue is like water: it benefits everything without exciting rivalries." He then instructs, "We should be like water, choosing the lowest place which all others avoid. We are then closely akin to TAO" (28-29). One would be wisest to place himself or herself in a position of little prestige or merit, avoiding both power and strength. According to the Taoist doctrine, one can be "as pure as the water in the ocean" if one seeks only from life to be "as fresh as the morning air, as pure as a babe in its mother's arms, as free as a homeless wanderer." Those who strive to be "admired and envied," "clever," "smart and aggressive" "sensible and prudent" are described by Laotzu as being not unlike a "wicked man" (35). To seek fame and wealth and glory is to be defiant to the way of the Tao.

By living a lowly existence, expecting little from life, one can attain happiness and a community based on decency according to Taoist philosophy. Steinbeck provides, via his story-telling in both Cannery Row and the The God in the Pipes, two similar communities that are each united in their lack of social conduct and their disregard for laws and norms. Taoism actually teaches that one

should not only avoid laws and social codes, but that following such rules almost always lead to "aggravated...evil" (Laotzu 47). Laotzu writes that there are many paths to follow when one lives his or her life. The best way, he says, is to follow the Tao, the center of all existence and non-existence. Few, however, are capable of this due to the complexity of Taoism. The next best way through life is to follow teh, which is the path or the "way" to Tao. After these, Laotzu dictates that the third best path to follow is "benevolence," and fourth best is "righteousness." When a man does not follow any of these courses through life, that man then typically chooses to follow social codes. This, the following of social codes, is defined by Laotzu as the cause of "disorder," "allurements," and "foolishness" within society (47).

In A&E Biography: John Steinbeck, a documentary on John Steinbeck's life, it is stated that, "Steinbeck's concern for the underdog made him a hero with America's masses - and a feared enemy of the establishment." Steinbeck seems to pride himself on the social distance between his characters and the "ideal" person. In the introduction to Cannery Row, Steinbeck admits that the characters in the text will be "whores, pimps, gamblers,

and sons of bitches." This declaration is not initially startling, since many people enjoy reading about scandalous characters. Yet, in the following sentence, Steinbeck shockingly praises the same characters, saying that if one were to observe these same individuals through "another peephole" it would become apparent that they are also "saints and angels and martyrs and holy men." Steinbeck mystifies the reader when he asserts that to call a person a "saint" or a "whore" or a "pimp" or an "angel" is really to mean "the same thing" (1).

As is the case with many religions and philosophies, Taoism teaches that bad must exist for good to be known. The Tao Teh Ching explains that "comparisons" are confusing and inaccurate because "the difficult and the easy," "the high and the low" and "the loud and the soft" can only be known "when placed in contrast with each other" (26). Because comparisons are only relative to that which an idea is being compared to, Taoists believe that judgments should be avoided all together. Through this ideology, a man can encompass the traits of a "saint" or a "son of a bitch" depending solely upon the criteria used to judge him. Yet, either "peephole" would be inaccurate, according to Laotzu, because each term and the connotations which derive from

each term only exist in comparison to one another. Nothing, then, is purely good or purely bad and only false criteria and comparisons allow us to name an object or person as one or the other. What is fascinating about Steinbeck's work is his ability to make this concept clear. Through Laotzu, the contradictory ideas of a man being both good and bad seem impossible, but through Steinbeck's storytelling, the metaphor becomes concrete as we see noble bums, moral whores, and wise drunks.

The concepts of goodness and badness are further explained in the final section of the 1939 Bhikshu Wai-Tao and Dwight Goddard translation of Tao Teh Ching. Concluding this translation is a memoir titled, "Essays Interpreting Taoism," by Henri Borel. Borel describes a visit to the Taoist Sage of Shein Shan who becomes his Master and teacher. When Borel admits to the sage of Shein Shan that he has lived a sinful life, and therefore may not be capable of truly attaining oneness with the Tao, the sage replies:

Do not believe it, do not believe it...No man can annihilate Tao, and there shines in each one of us the inextinguishable light of the soul. Do not believe that the evilness of humanity is

so great and so mighty. The eternal Tao dwells in all; in murderers and harlots as well as in philosophers and poets. All bear within them an indestructible treasure and not one is better than another. You cannot love the one in preference of the other; you cannot bless the one and damn the other. They are as alike in essence as two grains of sand on this rock...Their sins are illusive, having the vagueness of vapors. Their deeds are false seeming; and their words pass away like ephemeral dreams. They cannot be 'bad,' they cannot be 'good' either. (Borel 86)

The connection between this passage and Steinbeck's Cannery Row is considerable. As the sage of Shein Shan teaches Borel to ignore the sins of humanity and see that "murderers and harlots" are capable of oneness with Tao just as much as "philosophers and poets," Steinbeck beckons his reader to consider that "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches" are also "saints and angels and martyrs and holy men." That Steinbeck tosses away stereotypical images of good and bad and challenges his reader to see that the two terms are misleading, is most certainly Taoist in nature. Cannery Row leaves the reader with a conundrum

as it is discovered that, within the story, those who work are, in fact, less moral, less content, and in general, less desirable than Mack and the boys: the good for nothings, the blots on the town. Steinbeck turns our perception upside down as we, the reader, find ourselves being asked to value and respect characters that are typically regarded as disrespectable and worthless to any materialistic society.

In both of Steinbeck's texts, the themes derive from the idea that to be identified as a scoundrel and a societal outcast can, in fact, be advantageous and can lead to a more satisfactory and even moral existence. In both writings, Steinbeck transforms the abstract metaphors developed by Laotzu into concrete images as we see homeless men literally being "like water," living where only water should reside, in homes that "all others" would surely "avoid," making homes in abandoned water pipes. Moreover, in both texts, the men encompass a metaphorical lowliness by living simplistically, free of possessions and thus, free of the burdens that undoubtedly come with the desire to be successful, rich, and prosperous.

In The God in the Pipes, for example, when the wandering, disheveled Cameron arrives in Monterey, Mr. Boss

offers to rent him a section of smoke stack to live in, a "rich" (5) home, apparently, since it measures forty inches across. Cameron declines, hoping to find a place much more "snug" and "simple" (6). He finds a home that he describes as "just right" when Mr. Boss shows him a "fourteen incher," a rusty water pipe that is barely long enough for him to lie down in. He rents the small water pipe, and immediately impresses Mr. Boss with his ability to "curb the natural desires for luxury" (6). Yet, we immediately discover that Mr. Boss, himself, knows little of luxury, since he too lives amongst his people in the tight-knit community of pipe homes. Here, the men and women literally live, as water, in water pipes. "Do not be troubled because of the narrowness of your dwelling," Laotzu instructs, "do not become depressed because of the life you are compelled to live" (65). The Goddard translation of Laotzu's instructions about being content with a small home, and being pleased to live like water, is presented to us literally by Steinbeck in The God in the Pipes. Here, Steinbeck's interpretation of the perfect Taoist home as a water pipe is not in any way figurative; the characters do live like water in remarkably narrow dwellings. Thus, the image of a Taoist home provided by Steinbeck in his

fictional world is almost an exact interpretation of Goddard's translation.

That Steinbeck had his characters literally live within water pipes, where only water should reside, directly echoes Laotzu's teachings. Yet, one must wonder what Steinbeck meant by "God" in the title. Since Steinbeck did not complete The God in the Pipes, one can only speculate what the title would have implied for the reader. Certainly, within the confines of a water pipe seems an unlikely place to encounter God. Although the Tao Teh Ching does not teach of a physical God, Tao has historically been compared to the Christian idea of God, just as Lao-Tzu has been equated to Jesus, Buddha, and other messiahs from various religious tomes. In fact, many philosophers view marked similarities between the teachings of Laotzu and Jesus, with a major difference being that Jesus teaches of a personified conception of God, while Laotzu characterizes Tao as an impersonal force. Laotzu writes, "Tao is invisible but permeates everywhere" (27).

Interestingly, the inner space of objects is what is referred to in the Tao Teh Ching as "non-existence," and it is precisely in areas of non-action and non-existence that humankind is closest to Tao. Laotzu states, "There are

thirty spokes in a wheel, but its utility lies in the hole of the hub. The potter forms clay into jars, but their usefulness depends upon the enclosed space. A carpenter builds the walls of a house...but the value of the house is measured by the space within the walls" (30). Mr. Boss and his citizens use the areas of emptiness, of non-existence, the space within the pipes to provide shelter, sanctuary, and solitude. Tao can be discovered in the most unlikely of places, and Steinbeck shows the magnitude of this when Tao is found running through a community of hobos and homeless people. They have filled a void within the pipes and taken that which seems useless and made it a habitat. This very action, this very existence, this community, which begins as a community of good-will and harmony may very well, itself, represent what Steinbeck meant by the declaration "God" as we observe the characters living a seemingly Taoist existence. The Sage of Shien Shan relates to Henri Borel that, "Tao is really nothing but that which you Westerners call 'God.' Tao is the One; the beginning and the end. It embraces all things, and to it all things return" (Borel 81). God then, in Steinbeck's title, may not mean a western conception of God, or even a physical notion of God, but rather a metaphorical sense of

spirituality and godliness that comes with living non-materialistically and free from the burdens that appear when one is busy seeking social acceptance and wealth.

However, although their shanty town is certainly humble, and Steinbeck certainly wanted us to associate their existence with godliness, even Mr. Boss and his community of impoverished workers seem too refined, too sophisticated, in comparison to Mack and the boys from Cannery Row. If, as it seems Steinbeck intended, The God in the Pipes is a representation of what happens when humble people become greedy, Cannery Row takes a different route. According to the research conducted by Roy Simmonds, Steinbeck never finished writing The God in the Pipes and referred to it as "a clumsy vehicle at best" and "a picture of my confusion" (3). If, as I contend, this precursor to Cannery Row is indeed intended to represent Taoism, it must have been written only a short while after Steinbeck's encounter with Goddard's translation of the philosophy. Steinbeck continues, "I don't know the form of the new but I know there is a new which will be adequate and shaped by my new thinking" (Simmonds 3). This "new thinking" became Cannery Row. With additional time and further thought, it seems that Steinbeck was able to refine

his notion of Taoist modesty, and this is delightfully represented in the disfavored, yet good-natured characteristics of Mack and the boys. The new text, Cannery Row, is more developed, perhaps because the interpretations of Taoism rely more on figurative language and Steinbeck seems to make less effort to use literal images from the Tao Teh Ching. This seems to have allowed him a freedom to develop the story and the characters, while commenting on society; all are creative elements that are lacking in The God in the Pipes.

Although the revised Taoist text is less literal, still elements of the lifestyle of the homeless people are carried over from The God in the Pipes to Cannery Row. The bums in Cannery Row begin the story by inhabiting water pipes; though they later take over an abandoned shack they call "The Palace Flophouse." In fact, it seems to be no mere coincidence that Mack and the boys, the lazy, drunken do-nothings of the Row, continuously seem to flock towards water throughout the text, visiting streams to catch frogs or the ocean to catch specimens for Doc.

Laotzu writes, "Nothing is more fragile than water, yet of all the agencies that attack hard substances nothing can surpass water, nor take its place. Therefore the weak

are conquerors of the strong, and the yielding are conquerors of the mighty. Everyone knows this but few practice it" (67). Michael Meyer offers the theory that water fascinated both Steinbeck and Laotzu because it "possesses a quality of flexibility" along with a "willingness to bend." Both "Taoist thought and Steinbeckian philosophy" see water as expressing the "paradoxical qualities" of both strength and weakness that all humans should possess (128). Mack and the boys are certainly financially and socially weak, and perhaps, at times, one might argue that they are morally weak since they drink excessively and live a life that shows no regards for laws and social norms. Yet, as I will also illustrate, their faith in human kind and themselves shows that they do not possess spiritual weakness. They demonstrate what it is to be both weak and strong like water. Their financial and social weaknesses are clearly counter-balanced by their strength of character, good will, and happiness with what little they have. They exemplify what it means to contentedly live and survive in situations where most of us would fail from desperation; they know how to be lowly, and how to seek sanctuary in a world that sees them only as disgraceful and shameful. They have

discovered how to accept a life of ignominy and bathe in all of its glory.

Steinbeck describes Mack and the boys in much the same way that Laotzu describes an ideal Taoist. Laotzu directs one who wishes to attain oneness with Tao to consider:

Which is more intimately precious: fame or life? Which is more valuable: life or treasure? Which gives the most trouble: gain or loss? One naturally seeks the things he most prizes: for that reason we should be careful to prize the right things, because grasping and hoarding invite waste and loss both to property and life.

A contented person is never dishonored. One who knows how to stop with enough is free from danger; he will therefore endure. (51)

Taoists believe that one of the main sources of frustration, crime, and unhappiness within any society is that the citizens want things that they can never possess. The best way to avoid this is to want and expect nothing. Laotzu continues:

The perfect Sage, therefore, by practicing wu-wei and making no attempts, makes no failures and because he does not grasp anything, he has

nothing to lose. People in their eagerness are ever approaching success only to continually fail. If one is to succeed, he must be as careful to the end as at the beginning.

Therefore, the perfect Sage has no desire for things that are difficult to obtain, nor does he value them. He learns to be unlearned; he turns away from that which others greedily seek. In that spirit he helps all things toward their natural development but dares not attempt to force their development. (61)

Wu-wei is a Taoist term which means doing by not doing or action by non-action. To attain perfection as a Taoist, one must abandon the idea of being successful, rich and admired. He or she must not seek greatness in any way. Then, that person will attain a degree of success, wealth and admiration, though perhaps not success in society, financial wealth, or admiration from the masses. These three terms, in fact, will mean something different to the perfect sage than they do to a normal person.

Steinbeck's Mack and the boys are intelligent, able-bodied men who could certainly hold jobs if they wanted to. They could have careers, financial success, regular homes,

even families. And yet, they choose to spend their days drinking and relaxing, finding tossed away stoves and furniture, studying, and reflecting upon nature in childish, unsophisticated ways. Steinbeck writes of them:

They are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them. Mack and the boys are the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces. In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends,

blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums.. Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys. Virtues and graces and laziness and zest. Our Father who art in nature. (15)

In Steinbeck's depiction, Mack and the boys certainly seem to fit Laotzu's description of the perfect sage. Mack and the boys seek very little from life, and thus avoid disappointment. They are content to live in an abandoned shack, furnished with nothing more than junk and debris. Laotzu directs mankind to seek a lowly stature in the community, to have few aspirations, and to appear uneducated. Mack and the boys hold, one might say, the lowest position in all of Cannery Row. They want nothing more than to drink, and even then are content to drink a disgusting concoction made up of left-over booze from the glasses of people who visit the local bar. Sometimes they drink Old Tennis Shoes, a cheap wine that Steinbeck describes as tasting much like its name.

Steinbeck makes an assumption that "Our Father who art

in Nature" is the caretaker for Mack and the boys and seems to have a strong affection for people like them. Tao, although sexless, is frequently referred to as Mother or Father; this statement also echoes the personification of the Christian Heavenly Father. Rhetorically, this helps to westernize Steinbeck's depiction of the eastern philosophy. While the ideas presented are certainly eastern, the language, such as "Our Father who art in nature" will, for most members of a western audience, immediately bring to mind The Lord's Prayer. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the first twenty-four pages of Laotzu's Tao and Wu Wei contain Goddard's discussion of the similarities between Jesus and the idea of the Tao. And although Laotzu strives to de-personify Tao, the "deity" of Taoism, it is not uncommon for Taoist storytellers to attribute Tao with human characteristics. Steinbeck seems to have done this with this introductory quote; however, the silent concept of Tao within his text does seem to be impersonal throughout the actual story. More important, however, is the fact that viewing Tao as an entity of nature is specifically discussed in Henri Borel's essays. Borel quotes Professor de Groot, a German philosopher, who states that although the term Tao itself is not entirely capable

of being translated, if "one translates this word by 'the universal soul of Nature,' 'the all-pervading energy of Nature,' or merely by the word 'Nature' itself, one will surely not be far from [Laotzu's] meaning" (123).

Steinbeck, who seems to have purposefully avoided using the term "Tao," is still able to capture the fundamental spirit of Taoism by referring to it as the Father in Nature.

It is likewise interesting that Steinbeck alludes to tigers in his metaphorical rendition of the American society based upon accomplishment and power because Laotzu uses the figure of the tiger in a very similar allegory. In Cannery Row, the tigers represent the world of business, the greed of wealth, and the sickness (both spiritually and physically) that comes with seeking success. Mack and the boys, in their infinite disregard for achievements, are able to "dine" with the tigers, unlike most men who are "ruled" by them. Goddard's translation has Laotzu stating that one who is traveling through life under the guidance of Tao will have no need to fear tigers, because the tiger will find no place upon the body to place his claws. "Why is this so?" Laotzu asks. Because one who has "attained mastery over their spirit" is in possession of a spirit that "transcends mortality" (53). Both Steinbeck and

Laotzu's metaphors essentially represent the same ideology. While certainly Mack and the boys, and one who has attained the attributes of the perfect sage, will eventually die a physical death, they are able to avoid a spiritual death which is caused by seeking that which one can never possess, being greedy, or worshipping possessions. That both Goddard and Steinbeck use "tigers" as a means to express essentially the same concept is undoubtedly no mere coincidence.

In the same spirit that Laotzu asked over 2500 years ago, "Which is more valuable: life or treasure?" (51), Steinbeck probes his readers, "What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals?" (15). The people of Cannery Row acknowledge that "Mack could have been president of the U.S. if he wanted." But one of the boys concludes, "What would he do with it if he had it?" (84). Doc says that Mack and his boys could be exceedingly wealthy if they desired it. "They could ruin their lives and get money," he ponders. "Mack has the qualities of a genius. They're all very clever...They just know the nature of things too well to get caught up in the wanting" (142). By choosing to follow a lowly, simple path, Mack

and the boys unknowingly become literal prodigies of Taoism. They provide the concrete detail necessary for one who would not understand Laotzu's philosophy to visualize what a Taoist might look like. It does not matter that Mack and the boys do not know of Taoism, its practices, or its doctrines. All that matters is that they seem to know "the nature of things" (142), and through this, they know that greed is not beneficial to their way of life. Unlike many philosophies or religions, knowing and understanding is unessential to Taoism. In fact, to be a perfect sage of Taoism, Laotzu instructs that one must not try to be perfect nor sage-like. To strive for perfection goes against the ways of Taoism. "When people abandon the idea of becoming a sage and give up ambition for worldly knowledge and learning, then their innate goodness will have a chance to manifest itself and will develop a hundredfold" (34). When Henri Borel asks the sage of Shein Shan to help him "find the path to human goodness," the sage replies, "You err somewhat in this matter...strive not so busily to be so very good. Do not seek it, or you will never find the true wisdom" (79). It would seem unreasonable and unlikely that homeless men such as Cameron or Mack and the boys would be scholars of Taoism. Yet,

ironically, the very fact that they do not possess familiarity with the philosophy provides the capability for them to excel as potential Taoists.

Therefore, Steinbeck provides a text where the reader must question what he or she values. While the working class citizens of the text see only the parasitic qualities of the boys, the reader is given a glimpse into their true essences. Although, as a reader, we may have initially judged these characters' laziness and vulgarity, there is no doubt that by the end of the text Steinbeck anticipates that we will agree with Doc, who says of the bums:

Look at them. They are your true philosophers...Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world and everything that will happen. I think they survive better in this world than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want.

(141-142)

Doc is impressed with Mack and the boys, and perhaps even envious of their sovereignty. He understands, at least to some degree, that to have no ambitions or desires is essentially a form of freedom. Mack and the boys are unique in the fact that they want little, and thus are happy and content to have little. We, as readers, must pause to question our own values and expectations of life; an introspection which surely would have pleased both Steinbeck and Laotzu. Mack and the boys essentially become an example of the complex ideology of doing by not doing.

In the end, there is no doubt that Mack and the boys live an existence quite different than that which the common American is aware of. As first highlighted by Lisca, Doc continues his praises of Mack and the boys by making a bet with Richard Frost that they will not turn their heads to watch a Fourth of July Parade when it passes by. Doc feels that if Mack and the boys choose not to look at the parade when it passes, it proves that they have philosophical minds. Since they know, as anyone does, what a parade looks like, Doc hypothesizes that they will not bother to even take one glance at it as it goes by. Richard Frost, who does not understand why avoiding a peek at a parade proves that Mack and boys possess philosophical

minds, still feels certain he will win the bet because "a man doesn't live who doesn't have to look at a parade" (143). Doc and Richard Frost peer out of Doc's window watching the men, who are sitting on a log with their back to the parade. As it passes, Doc and Richard notice that, "not a head turned, not a neck straightened up. The parade filed past, and they did not move. And then the parade was gone" (144). As can be seen with the Tao Teh Ching, denizens can, in fact, be considered philosophers. But, like Richard Frost, the reader is left to wonder how not looking at a parade proves that one has a philosophical mind. Steinbeck does not answer this quandary; however the answer seems to lie in Goddard's translation of Laotzu's teachings. Laotzu directs that by "not going out of the door, the sage has knowledge of the world. Not looking through the window, he perceives the TAO of Heaven...the perfect Sage does not think about worldly affairs, but he understands the significance of all things" (52). Just as most people strive to attain better and more possessions, and greater knowledge, most people would be inclined to turn their head to look at a parade. Mack and the boys, however, are not like most other people. Here, Steinbeck has demonstrated an extreme and very concrete example of

non-action, or wu-wei, as we see Mack and the boys caring so little about that which fascinates the average person that they choose to not even look at a parade passing right behind them. That the parade is supposed to commemorate Fourth of July seems also significant. To not watch the parade could be considered socially unacceptable, unpatriotic, and even offensive. Yet, here we see Mack and the boys' disregard for social norms and codes. The Tao Teh Ching remarks that those who are not living in alignment with Tao spend their lives trying to keep busy and entertained "with enjoyments as if they were celebrating a feast day, or as if they were flocking to games." Laotzu instructs that, by participating in such foolishness, one only receives a false sense of happiness. According to Laotzu, true happiness only comes from living one's life as if one was "a deaf-mute" (35). Certainly, a deaf-mute may not be inclined to turn to look at a parade, so here again, Steinbeck has taken a metaphor from the Tao Teh Ching and made it a concrete image as we see Mack and the boys literally being deaf to the parade and, also, the social norms of their time.

This image of Mack and the boys ignoring the parade demonstrates Steinbeck's developing notion of Taoism. In

The God in the Pipes, the homeless men and women awaken each morning to pay reverence to the work whistle. The irony is that they do not work. Rather, they are paying homage to the whistle only because it is tradition; it is what they believe they should do. Perhaps they do not even know what the whistle means or stands for. Still, while the idea of tradition is important to Taoist thought, this image of unemployed people bowing to a work whistle seems ludicrous. In a way, by revering the whistle, they seem to be worshipping the very concept of work. This, of course, sends a contradictory message to the reader, and almost implies that the homeless people wish for work. On the other hand, with the characters of Mack and the boys, it is very clear that they have embraced the rebellious, anti-society, anti-assimilative lifestyle that is Taoism.

Because Mack and the boys value all aspects of simplicity, they have no regard for work or workers. Throughout all of Cannery Row, Mack and the boys enjoy the hours of the sunrise and sunset, and Steinbeck refers to these times as "the hour of the pearl - the interval between day and night when time stops and examines itself" (86). During the day, the group of men usually sleep, "retired in disgust" (2) from watching all of the people

hustle around working in the name of materialism. However, at sunrise and sunset, "Cannery Row becomes itself again - quiet and magical" and the boys emerge from their slumber to "sit on the rusty pipes in the vacant lot" (2).

Steinbeck explains that during this mystical time between night and day:

The Row seems to hang suspended out of time in a silvery light...No automobiles are running then. The street is silent of progress and business. And the rush and drag of the waves can be heard as they splash in among the piles of the canneries. It is a time of great peace, a deserted time, a little era of rest." (85)

Laotzu also decries the day, saying that during that time, "our senses are kept busy in activities" (29). Of course, according to Taoist philosophy, it is better to remain inactive than to waste time trying to work and attain material goods. Laotzu teaches that not-doing is really doing in its truest sense. So, for Mack and the boys, Steinbeck's hour of the pearl is, essentially, the best time for them, the time of the day when nothing is occurring on the Row, and thus all is capable of taking its natural course.

That Steinbeck compares this hour of stillness to a pearl is extraordinary in its similarity to a message put forth by the sage of Shein Shan who imparts a thematically comparable story to Henri Borel that was originally told by Laotzu's disciple, Chuang-Tse. In the tale told by Shein Shan, The Yellow Emperor loses his pearl. The pearl, itself, is a metaphorical symbol of his soul, according to the sage. The Yellow Emperor "besought his wits to find it, but in vain. He besought his sight to find it, but in vain. He besought his eloquence to find it, but that was also in vain. At last he besought Nothing, and Nothing recovered it" (80). Borel discovers that to find his own pearl, (representative of his soul), he must do nothing since "knowledge, sight and speech do but cloud the soul rather than enlighten it; and that it was only in the peace of perfect quietude that his soul's consciousness was restored to the Yellow Emperor" (80). Steinbeck teaches, just as Chuang-Tse and the sage of Shein Shan, that nothingness, calmness and peace are what make the inhabitants of Cannery Row special and spiritual. Mack, in particular, detests work and has no desire to ever do it. Yet, he also possesses "good will and good fellowship and a desire to make everyone happy" (11). Just as he values the

quietness and stillness of the hour of the pearl, the Yellow Emperor was able to find his soul, the pearl, only by remaining quiet and still.

Thus, while Cameron and the motley group from the unfinished text of The God in the Pipes possess a few of the elements of Laotzu's description of the perfect sage, in Cannery Row, Steinbeck is able to truly capture this philosophy through the characters of Mack and the boys. Towards the end of the text, Steinbeck probes his reader to consider all of the people who live a lowly yet spiritual existence when the character of Doc reflects:

It has always seemed strange to me...The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our society. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first, they love the produce of the second...The sale of souls to gain the whole world is completely voluntary and almost unanimous - but not quite. Everywhere in the world, there are Mack and the boys. I've

seen them in an ice-cream seller in Mexico, and
in an Aleut in Alaska. (143)

If we are to have learned something from Steinbeck's plotless novel, it may be that we are to have acquired an appreciation for those who live a lowly life and consciously choose to give up possessions for the purposes of retaining their own spiritual and physical health. Certainly, we praise monks for their sacrifices, but Steinbeck teaches that this is not enough. Perhaps, he suggests the humble, the meek, the lowly, the impoverished, whores, pimps, gamblers, sons of bitches, hobos, bums, do-nothings, blots on the towns, and Mack and the boys are all likewise deserving of admiration, for they quite possibly possess a spiritual freedom most of us will never know. Steinbeck has successfully taken the nameless, faceless, impersonal depiction of Laotzu's "perfect sage" and given it life through the paradoxically despicable and honorable characters of Mack and the boys, who remain, in fact, very much "like water."

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE TROUBLES OF THE WORLD WILL RIGHT THEMSELVES":

DISORDER AND ORDER IN STEINBECK'S TEXTS

As with many philosophies and religions, one Taoist goal is to answer the question: "Why do bad things happen?" Ultimately, Taoists endeavor to accept disorder and grief as a natural part of growth, and their ultimate goal is an acceptance of everything. According to the doctrine of Taoism, good and bad (and all other oppositions) only exist because of the other, and neither is real. Dwight Goddard interprets Laotzu's teachings, "Everything in the world is mutually opposing and revealing itself" (26). For one to see the true beauty of life and existence, one must specifically accept the good and bad, along with the order and the disorder that is experienced in life. Obviously, few struggle to accept what they consider good and ordered; it is that which society sees as bad and chaotic that troubles people.

The Tao Teh Ching, which is broken into eighty-one short passages, has no discerning order, thus becoming a first lesson in an acceptance of chaos. Basically, the text begins in the middle of Laotzu's teachings and ends in

the middle as well. There is no discriminating structure to his teachings, and the ideas are neither categorized nor grouped according to any theme or idea. Steinbeck's Cannery Row essentially follows the same format of having no real format at all. His thirty-two short vignettes are largely unrelated and in no discernable order. The characters are introduced intermittently, and the story is told in a disjointed manner, as if the text itself is to be an emulation of Laotzu's writing style.

Steinbeck begins his composition of Cannery Row by questioning his ability to even describe the Row in such a way that the audience will understand the beauty of its paradoxical qualities:

How can the poem and the stink and the grating noise - the quality of light, the tone, the habit and the dream - be set down alive? When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole, for they break and tatter under the touch. You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book

- to open the page and let the stories crawl in by themselves. (3)

Steinbeck warns the reader from the onset that the tale will be a paradigm of chaos and humbles himself by denying his narrative ownership. To try to tell the "story" of Cannery Row in an orderly way would go against the very nature of what Steinbeck regards to be the beautiful paradoxes of the Row. He openly admits that it will be a struggle for him to capture in words the essence of a place that he regards to be simultaneously a "poem" and a "grating noise." Furthermore, to try to apply a discernable order to his story would go against the nature of Taoism.

In unquestionable similarity, Laotzu begins his text by questioning the Tao's ability to be told. "The TAO that can be 'tao-ed' can not be the infinite TAO...It is the same with the name of things: if things are explicable, the names we give them can not be the original Name" (25). Laotzu and Steinbeck both taunt the reader with the first lesson of Taoism: acceptance. Simply reading each text becomes a test of the reader's will and patience. And in both texts, it is not until the end that one can reflect and see the relationships between the parts and ascertain

the texts as whole.

Also, Steinbeck continues the mutual theme between his text of bums with that of Laotzu's text of ancient philosophy, by writing, as Laotzu did before him, about the futility of words. Steinbeck writes, "The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out" (14). Essentially, we are warned in both texts that we will be confused, not because of our ignorance, but because words and names cannot adequately express what either author hopes to convey, since words and names of things are presented only as metaphors for the actual object, thing, or idea; metaphors cannot represent reality.

Steinbeck dabbles with his method of showing instead of preaching when he demonstrates this Taoist idea in The God in the Pipes. Joe asks Cameron to describe Salinas. Cameron's reply encompasses Taoist thinking as he replies, "it's hard to pick off pieces to tell. I can think of it as a beautiful whole thing; how can I break it up?" (4). He knows that for the sake of brevity, it would be

impossible to describe every aspect of Salinas. The details and general emotions that ARE Salinas cannot be captured by his humble description. The Taoist law of unity and solidity seem to be understood by even the simpleminded Cameron. Joe can never rightfully experience the beauty of Cameron's vision of Salinas. According to Goddard's translation, Laotzu teaches that "when a carriage is separated into its parts it is no longer a carriage, its unity is lost" (48). Cameron can only use words to describe Salinas, and words can only describe parts of Salinas, and thus are insufficient.

In life, the same is true, according to Taoist thought. A life cannot be good; a life cannot be bad. To say a life is good or bad, or that a person is good or bad, is to only look at a piece of that person or that life. Laotzu comments, "Time will show that the humblest will attain supremacy, the dishonored will be justified, the empty will be filled, the old will be rejuvenated, [and] those content with little will be rewarded with much" (36). In part, Laotzu's message is that good things will happen to bad people, bad things will happen to good people, bad people will be good, and good people will be bad. Chaos will lead to order. Order will lead to disorder. Paradox

is the natural progression through life. Ultimately, however, everything will work out as it should, and a Taoist should not question that which seems wrong or inconsistent. The ultimate goal of a Taoist is acceptance of all things and an understanding that good and bad, morality and immorality, beauty and ugliness, chaos and order must exist equally and only exist because of the other. Naturally, this is a pervading theme throughout Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes, as we witness bad things and disorder being followed by goodness and order within the lives of the characters.

In fact, this theme of the paradoxical qualities in all humans is carried out from the introduction of the first character in Cannery Row. Lee Chong, the town grocer, is described as being "evil balanced and held suspended by good - an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register" (14). Steinbeck shows the greed and chaos in this otherwise good man's life by describing him as "suspended, spinning, whirling among groceries and ghosts. A hard man with a can of beans. A soft man with the bones of his grandfather" (14). This quote, while providing the only direct mention

of Laotzu, also provides an important Taoist philosophy. Lee Chong is not a bad man, despite the fact that his career choice as a grocer requires him to be interested in profit and commercialism. However, in spite of the fact that he is not a bad man, Lee Chong can not fully be a Taoist (due to his own greed), and his life will be filled with chaos. However, there is hope for him. Laotzu writes, "The primal principle of potentiality, as it becomes active, brings the negative and positive together and there is manifestation" (50). When Lee Chong agrees to accept a fish-meal shed as payment from Horace Abbeville, a poor man who is deeply in debt, he doesn't know that the debt is being cleared so that Horace can commit suicide. When the news of Horace's death reaches Lee, "his nice brown eyes were turned inward on a calm and eternal Chinese sorrow...It was deeply a part of Lee's kindness and understanding that a man's right to kill himself is inviolable, but sometimes a friend can make it unnecessary" (9). In the end, the wealthy Lee Chong pays for the funeral, Horace Abbeville's family never is without groceries, and the fish-smelling storage unit is given to Mack and the boys, and becomes affectionately known as The Palace Flophouse. Lee Chong's initial greed is counter-

balanced by his generosity. His generosity sets the stage for the setting of Steinbeck's tale. A bad action is made right with goodness.

Steinbeck exhibits the irony of Laotzu's philosophy. Literally, in Cannery Row, the Taoist qualities of the Row's inhabitants manifest only because of the sanctuary where Mack and the Boys can flourish together in drunken laziness. Without Lee Chong's greed, he would have never acquired the feed house. Thus, the Palace Flophouse would have never existed. Therefore, as a concrete example of the necessity of bad in order for good to exist, Steinbeck shows us that Lee Chong's greed is necessary for the Taoist story of Cannery Row to exist. A greedy action paves the way for a lesson in the greatness of freedom from materialism as we see Mack and the Boys growing spiritually because of their lack of possessions.

This same idea is evident, though less developed, in The God in the Pipes. Cameron, the first character introduced, also takes on both immoral and Taoist qualities, and like Lee Chong, Cameron does not fit the role of a Taoist. In fact, Cameron's role within the story seems to be to cause chaos. Overall, he is a good man. He asks Mr. Boss for a small dwelling, he loves his hometown

of Salinas, he sees the people there as being "godlike" and overall, he lives a modest life. He is a potential Taoist, but cannot actually be one because of his own desire to see Mr. Boss's bottle. Laotzu suggests, "One way to realize the wonderful mystery of the TAO is to put away all thoughts and desires" (25). Cameron, instead, leaves the town he idolizes so that he may see the bottle, and by doing so, may have caused the undoing of the community of bums that Mr. Boss leads.

When Cameron finally befriends Mr. Boss, he hands his one valuable possession, his gun, over to Mr. Boss for safekeeping. At this very moment, the mood of the composition changes. Just as the gun is exchanged between the two men, "a little cloud darkened the morning sun; the dark shadow fell over the pipes. And distantly there sounded a little grumbling roll of thunder" (7). It is evident that Steinbeck had intended the repositioning of the gun to cause some sort of disorder, since after the sound of the thunder "emerged the ancient Chinaman," whose race, I believe, is no mere coincidence. "He walked falling from step to step down the path in front of the pipes and a little thunder sounded in the sky...When he had gone the sun returned" (7). The ancient Chinaman is a

mysterious character; he clearly serves as some type of a warning to Mr. Boss. After the Chinaman is out of sight, "An old woman whimpered in her pipe." Mr. Boss said aloud, "Morning and evening he passes but never now. It is an omen - it is some kind of warning. Times are changing" (8). Mr. Boss's lack of perfect Taoist leadership and Cameron as a cause of chaos reach their height at this point, as Mr. Boss ignores the warning and still takes into his possession Cameron's gun.

It is no happenstance that Steinbeck chooses a gun to be the downfall of his experimental Taoist community. Specifically, in Goddard's translation of the Tao Teh Ching, Laotzu instructs, "Both arms and armor are unblessed things. Not only men come to detest them, but a curse seems to follow them...Men of good character [avoid all weapons]" (42). Immediately after the passing of the gun between hands, Mrs. Boss goes for a walk. She discovers the Dump People. This leads to her criticism of Mr. Boss, and it seems inevitable that the community will take a definite change towards materialism and away from Taoism.

There is no gun in Steinbeck's revision of the story, Cannery Row. However, the ancient Chinaman is transferred and embellished in the new text with Steinbeck's refined

thinking. The old Chinaman in Cannery Row is the most mysterious of all of the characters. At dawn and dusk he travels to the beach dressed in tattered clothes and carrying a basket. His loose soles on his shoes slap the ground when he walks:

People, sleeping, heard his flapping shoe go by and they awakened for a moment. It had been happening for years but no one ever got used to him. Some people thought he was God and very old people thought he was Death and children thought he was a very old Chinaman. (23)

The children do not tease the old Chinaman "as they should" because they are a little scared of him. However, when one "brave" boy, Andy, visits Cannery Row, he knows "he must shout at him if only to keep his self-respect...Andy watched him go by evening after evening while his duty and his terror wrestled." Finally, one evening, Andy finds himself "marching" behind the old man "singing in a shrill falsetto, 'Ching-Chong Chinaman sitting on a rail- 'Long came a white man an' chopped off his tail'" (23). What follows is the most mysterious section of the novel:

The old man stopped and turned. Andy stopped.
The deep-brown eyes looked at Andy and the thin

corded lips moved. What happened then Andy was never able either to explain or forget. For the eyes spread out until there was no Chinaman. And then it was one eye - one huge brown eye as big as a church door. Andy looked through the shiny transparent brown door and through it he saw a lonely countryside, flat for miles but ending against a row of fantastic mountains shaped like cows' and dogs' heads and tents and mushrooms. There was low coarse grass on the plain and here and there a little mound. And a small... woodchuck sat on each mound. And the... desolate cold aloneness of the landscape made Andy whimper because there wasn't anybody at all in the world...Andy shut his eyes [and was back in Cannery Row.] (23-24)

Through the character of the Chinaman, it becomes clear that Steinbeck's representation of Taoism has changed between The God in the Pipes and Cannery Row. In The God in the Pipes the Chinaman serves as simply a foreshadowing of the future. However, in Cannery Row he becomes an actual teacher of Taoist thought thus transforming Andy into a disciple.

In The God in the Pipes, the old Chinaman is mystifying primarily because of the darkness and thunder that seems to follow him. His presence works only as an oversimplified foreshadowing of the collapse of the pipe community after the exchange of the gun. He, as a character, offers no further insight into Taoism. On the other hand, in Cannery Row the Chinaman serves as a more complex, and yet a more direct representation of Taoism itself as a philosophy. Metaphorically, Andy becomes the student of Taoism with the Chinaman being his teacher, a figure both in front of and behind a brown church door. Like young, "brave" Andy from the Row, Henri Borel admits in his Essays Interpreting Taoism that he felt great fear the first time that he realized that "Life is cold and empty" (91). His mind was not quite ready to grasp the idea of Taoism, and it left him feeling sad to find out that everything he had worked for in his life (materialistic wants, relationships, love) was meaningless. In fact, upon encountering the philosophy of Taoism, Borel felt that the world was singing "a sad monotonous song, the wail of a flute accompanying it...the sound of infinitude swelled far and wide" (91). The old Chinaman, with his church door eye, seems to use the boy's own fear of

loneliness to punish young Andy for trying too hard to fit in with his peers, and specifically for resorting to cruelty to gain friendship and respect. The lesson is harsh, but the boy will never forget it. Together, the dichotomy of young and old between the boy and the old man metaphorically represent Taoism. To be a Taoist, both wisdom and innocence are simultaneously necessary. Age and youth exist only because of each other. And the disparity between Asian and Caucasian stands as a metaphor for Cannery Row, as Steinbeck presents an eastern philosophy to a western world.

In fact, just as opposites are important in Taoism, Steinbeck presents many opposites in his work. The most developed and concrete example of a Taoist lesson that deals with order versus chaos in Cannery Row is the dichotomy between the two parties that Mack and the boys throw for Doc. To, admittedly, simplify the plot of Cannery Row, it is a story about the planning of a party for Doc, a failed party that goes bad, and then a second party that is a success. Early in the text, before the reader really knows who Doc or Mack is, Mack makes a comment, "That Doc is a fine fellow. We ought to do something nice for him" (13). The boys concur, and they

eventually decide to throw a surprise party for Doc. Mack, in all of his unrefined simplicity, is a different person when he discusses Doc's party. This man, who usually allows things to happen as they will, tries too hard to throw Doc the perfect party, and in doing so, he falls into the trap that Laotzu warns his readers about. One who tries to grasp that which is beyond him or tries to attain wealth to impress others will "fall into confusion" (Laotzu 36). Such is the case with Mack.

Mack throws aside his own philosophy on life when it comes to the party, and in trying to assign order to the party, brings about disorder. He decides early on that if they are really going to give Doc a party "it has to be a good one" (45). And to him, a good party for Doc has to be almost pretentious and almost over-planned. His mistakes compound upon themselves. He declares that he and the boys have to get jobs (a rarity for them) to earn some money for real whiskey (a commodity they never buy) because Doc's "been to college" and therefore Mack is positive that he "wouldn't like the stuff from the winin' jug" (44). Mack insists that the party must have a cake (45). In addition, the only moment in the novel where he even seems concerned about finances is when he comments, "I figure it would take

ten or twelve bucks to give Doc a party that you wouldn't be ashamed of" (45). Mack's respect for Doc and his quest for the perfect party reaches its absolute height when he declares to the boys that they should buy Doc some "cuff links with his initials" (82). The boys, who are not normally as wise as Mack but still wise enough to recognize Mack's moment of ridiculous thought, do not think that the cuff links are a good idea. "Oh, horse shit" one of the boys says to Mack. "Doc don't want stuff like that" (82).

The party, which the boys decide to hold at Doc's own house, is very well planned out, especially considering Mack and the boys are the hosts. They purchase from Lee Chong whiskey, two gallons of wine, masks for the guests, decorations, a banner, and steaks. One of the boys even bakes Doc a cake. For all of its organization and planning, however, the party is the epitome of chaos. Doc does not show up to his own party; however, every drunk in town does. Mack and the boys lose control of the party fairly early on in the evening. The floor is badly burned, two windows are shattered, and the crystal in the phonograph is broken. By the time Doc arrives home the next morning, the house is in turmoil:

The front door hung sideways by one hinge. The

floor was littered with broken glass. Phonograph records, some broken, some only nicked, were strewn about. The plates with pieces of steak ends and coagulating grease were on the floor, on top of the bookcases, under the bed. Whiskey glasses lay sadly on their sides. Someone trying to climb the bookcases had pulled out a whole section of books and spilled them in broken-backed confusion on the floor. And it was empty, it was over. (126)

The disastrous party seems to be Steinbeck's warning about the dangers of trying to apply order to something which should not be organized: a party. And through his writing, Steinbeck severely punished the character of Mack for wandering away from his lazy, passive nature. The "bad" party angers Doc so much that he busts Mack in the mouth and knocks one of his teeth loose.

Although Doc immediately gives Mack a beer to smooth the punch over and forgives Mack, the punishment of the boys does not end there:

A black gloom settled over the Palace Flophouse. All the joy went out of it...As a kind of penance [Mack] did not wash his face...[Two of the

boys] applied for jobs and got them. Hazel felt so bad that he walked to Monterey and picked a fight with a soldier and lost it on purpose... Mack and the boys were under a cloud and they knew it and they knew they deserved it. All of their good intentions were forgotten now... And the story as it grew went this way: They had stolen liquor and money. They had maliciously broken into the laboratory and systematically destroyed it out of pure malice and evil. People who really knew better took this view... Socially Mack and the boys were beyond the pale...there are two possible reactions to social ostracism - either a man emerges determined to be better, purer, and kindlier or he goes bad, challenges the world and does even worse things. This last is by far the commonest reaction to stigma. (139-41)

After their severe punishments where they are viewed as evil men, Mack and the boys do, however, regain their normal lives. The boys refuse to feel bitter about how the people of the town treat them; rather, they see it as a necessary punishment for having wronged Doc. Instead of

harboring resentment, Mack goes to Dora, the whorehouse madam, for some advice on the situation. Her advice is simple and straightforward: to right the wrong Mack must give Doc another party, and this time he must do it right (150). Mack, who has learned from his first overly planned disaster, tells the boys of his new party, and declares, "No decorations this time...Just a good solid party with lots of liquor" (168). Thus, Steinbeck teaches Taoism to his western audience by taking us, the reader, through a planned party that is turned chaotic in a bad way, and a second, unplanned party that is wonderfully and chaotically fun as the guests drink excessively, fight like good ol' boys, hide from the cops, steal the cop's car, and even light firecrackers (188-9). The unplanned party is perfect, as Doc tells Lee Chong, "[a] Good Time!" (194).

In essence, Steinbeck transforms Laotzu's text, which is in part an instruction manual on how to appropriately govern a country, and uses it to teach the reader about the importance of impetuosity. Perhaps, the message is that the principles of Taoism are universal, then, and can be useful in all aspects of our lives. It is after all, according to Steinbeck, "generally understood that a party has a pathology, that it is a kind of individual and that

it is likely to be a very perverse individual...and a party hardly ever goes the way it is planned." He praises the unplanned party, calling the ones that are organized "dismal slave parties" that have been "whipped and controlled and dominated." Steinbeck continues by accusing the average, American-planned party of being little more than "acts and demonstrations" which are about "as spontaneous as peristalsis" (182).

Steinbeck, then, makes Laotzu's message into a metaphor. Steinbeck's party becomes a metaphorical lesson on how to live a Taoist life. He shows us through Mack's attempt to throw the perfect party what Laotzu has told us in his ancient Chinese text. Laotzu instructs that in life, one who is following a Taoist lifestyle should strive for only that which is "necessary" and "natural to our lifestyle" (41) and by doing this, a Taoist, or one like Mack who is living a Taoist lifestyle, can avoid the negative aspects of chaos and will therefore, in time, learn to embrace chaos and spontaneity as an important part of life.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THERE WILL BE NO SATISFYING THE DESIRES":

STEINBECK'S MESSAGE OF ANTI-DOMESTICATION

VIA TAOIST THOUGHT

John Steinbeck, like all who have retold and reinterpreted the Tao Teh Ching before him, reinvents parts of the philosophy thus shaping it into a message that is his own. In the preceding chapters, I have discussed many of the similarities of Steinbeck's Taoist message to that of Dwight Goddard's. In at least one interesting way, however, Steinbeck does deviate from the philosophy of Taoism to put forth his own agenda. Steinbeck, unlike Goddard, uses the philosophy of Taoism to point out his perception of the absurdities of westernized domestication, especially in regards to married women. This message is evident in The God in the Pipes, but it is even more developed in Cannery Row.

After Steinbeck's attempt at completing The God in the Pipes, the project was put on hold for awhile as Steinbeck worked as a correspondent during World War II. During his travels to Europe as a reporter, John Steinbeck spent his time day-dreaming about being home and was "very anxious"

to get back to his wife Gwyn (Benson 537). Yet, upon his return from the war, as Benson notes, "none of [Steinbeck's] dreams of domestic tranquility were satisfying for very long" (544). Around the time Steinbeck began writing Cannery Row, Gwyn announced that she was pregnant with Steinbeck's first child. Soon, Steinbeck found that "a pregnant wife was more an anchor than he would have desired" (Benson 545). Several biographical accounts state that Gwyn had a fierce temper. Thom Steinbeck, son to Gwyn and John, describes her as "frightening" and explains that his mother had a knack for "cutting [his father] off at the knees" (qtd. in John Steinbeck).

Jackson Benson writes that Cannery Row is "connected to Steinbeck's life in a number of ways" (555). Therefore, perhaps because of his domestic troubles at home, Cannery Row takes on a tone of anti-domestication or even anti-marriage that is not evident in Goddard's translation of Laotzu's work. Instead, Steinbeck seems to turn to Henri Borel's essays. Borel, unlike Goddard, discusses a message from the Sage of Shein Shan that compares the experience of sexuality to that of Taoism, making the claim that the action of being one with Tao is more satisfying than being

with a woman. In fact, the Sage of Shein Shan suggests that sexual desires are actually a desire to obtain oneness with Tao:

Love is no other than the rhythm of Tao...You see the woman before you. You believe her to be that towards which the rhythm is driving you. But even when the woman is yours, and you have thrilled at the touch of her, you feel the rhythm yet within you, unappeased, and you know that you must move forward, ever further. (Borel 111-2)

According to Borel, a wise person would see that sexual longing and love are unreal. Steinbeck builds upon the message of Borel's essays, and thus presents in Cannery Row a world where true happiness and even spirituality is possible only when a person lives a life devoid of love from or for the opposite sex.

The message about marriage is not so harsh in the early text, The God in the Pipes. Overall the men and women seem to live together in their pipe homes without quandary. The one exception to this is, of course, Mrs. Boss. Once she visits the Dump People, she becomes materialistic, racist, and ridiculous. Because of her newfound desire for materialistic items, she encompasses

the idea of the westernized temptress, luring Mr. Boss towards the evils of her newly acquired avaricious ways. Just before she reveals to him her discovery of the Dump People and her desire to have fine things like the Dump People, Mrs. Boss greedily beckons Mr. Boss to explain why they don't have any curtains in their home:

"But - dear," he said, bewildered. "There aren't any curtains because there aren't any windows for them to go over."

"There," she cried. "There you have put your finger on it. You apply some obtuse logic and it seems all right to you that our home should not have curtains. And how do you think I feel when...Mrs. Bean of the long upper pipe comes to call and there aren't any curtains?"

"But the Beans haven't any curtains either," he said mildly...

"Have you by any chance noticed," she said coldly, "that the Beans have a new end cloth? A printed cotton." (8-9)

The very fact that Mrs. Boss wishes to have curtains in her home despite the fact that there are no windows makes her appear foolish. Steinbeck juxtaposes her character with

Mr. Boss, who is portrayed as the epitome of generosity and wisdom. Her wishes are the embodiment of gluttony. She does not desire the items for the sake of need. She is, instead, caught up in trying to impress her neighbors - or more specifically, she is hoping to impress Mrs. Bean, who is fortunate enough to live in a "long" water pipe. This, however, is as far as Steinbeck takes the message in The God in the Pipes. Nothing else is said of love or relationships between men and women in this text.

Four years later, after returning from war and learning of his wife's pregnancy, Steinbeck immediately resumed the project, this time, of course, titling the text Cannery Row. In this new text, Steinbeck suggests a new message: love (between a man and a woman) hinders happiness. Mack and the boys have no sexual relationships, and have instead formed a family based solely upon relaxation. They drink beers, dig through trash cans to find things for their home, talk with each other, and plan Doc's party. They seem to have no desires or longings for women. They are content to live, almost as brothers, with only one another.

The same can be said of Dora and the girls, the madam and prostitutes of Cannery Row. Naturally, the girls do

not have the same freedom as Mack and the boys. After all, they are working women. And, due to their professions, the girls do partake in sexual activity. However, if, as Steinbeck seems to suggest, matrimony, domestication, and even love for a member of the opposite sex are all signs of spiritual weakness, Dora and the girls are able to avoid this because they are opposite from, as Steinbeck calls them, "the twisted and lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters" who live in Monterey County (16). Dora and her girls, in apparently a striking contrast to the other women of the Row, possess the traits of "tact and honesty, charity and certain realism" and are therefore "respected by the intelligent, the learned and the kind" (16). This description of Dora and the prostitutes sharply differs from the description of every other female character in Cannery Row, who are each made to look either silly (the whiny wife) or cruel (the overbearing wife).

In 1948, four years after the release of Cannery Row, Steinbeck writes in a letter to a friend published in Steinbeck: A Life in Letters that his marriage to Gwyn is ending and that the whole of the marriage had been filled with "bitter unhappiness." He continues, "It is an old story of female frustrations. She wants something I can't

give her so she must go on looking. And maybe she will never find out that no one can give it to her...She killed my love of her with little cruelties" (319). The next day he writes to another friend that now that his wife is gone he can return to "simplicity" (321), and that for the first time in many years he can "have some fun" (322). Perhaps Steinbeck's unhappy marriage was part of the catalyst for writing a Taoist text, or at least some of the components of his own marriage inspired parts of the text.

Steinbeck's Cannery Row was not sent for publication until 1945. In 1944, during the writing of the text, his son was born. As can be seen in his letters (Steinbeck: A Life in Letters), this new responsibility only made Steinbeck feel more trapped. He writes about his son, Thom, in a letter to a friend, "There isn't much to like about him yet. He just eats and sleeps and shits" (271). A month later he writes to his friend Carlton Sheffield, "There's so much horse shit about babies...I see nothing remarkable in this child at all...If I can I'm going to build a cell for him because that's where they belong for several years. They are mean little animals" (272). Steinbeck continues by admitting that he is in no way "gaga" about his son, who at the time is less than two

months old. As if one idea leads to another, Steinbeck's next paragraph to Sheffield begins, "I finished the book called Cannery Row. It will be out in January" (273).

Steinbeck's mood towards marriage and living the life of a father and husband is, it would seem, presented in Cannery Row. The unmarried women of Cannery Row are intelligent, nice and respectable. This is evident with the characters of Dora and the girls. The unmarried men of Cannery Row are free and happy, as is seen with Mack and the boys and Doc. The men who live only with other men and without the accompaniment of women are satisfied; the women who live without husbands are equally satisfied. In fact, Steinbeck seems to advocate a clear separation of the sexes, as we see contented prostitute women living only with other contented prostitute women, and contented homeless men living only with other contented homeless men. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that if, as is often believed to be the case, society accepts man as a sexual being and expects woman to be a being of prudence, then Dora and her girls and Mack and the boys envelop the exact opposites of their expected roles in society. And whereas they are happy with these antiassimilative ways, in a striking contrast, all who are married in the text are

miserable.

The novel begins with Horace Abbeville's suicide, which takes place only because "Horace had two wives and six children" and because of this he had "managed...to build a grocery debt second to none" (7). The debt causes Horace to kill himself, and the debt is caused by his two wives and children. Thus, essentially, it is because Horace is burdened by debt and the responsibilities of having a family, that he takes his own life. Horace Abbeville serves as a foil to the Taoist freedoms of Mack and the boys, who allow their minds to be unburdened by non-Taoist concerns such as bills, work ethics, and families.

Then, as a clear extension of The God in the Pipes, Steinbeck presents to us in Cannery Row two characters named Mr. and Mrs. Malloy, who live in an apartment made out of an abandoned boiler. For awhile they are "happy and contented there" (48). This mood and marriage changes when Mr. Malloy gets a job as a landlord. When the money starts coming in, Mrs. Malloy begins buying things. "First it was a rug, then a washtub, then a lamp with a colored shade" (48). Then one day, after acquiring these items, she comes into the boiler apartment and announces, "Holman's are

having a sale on curtains. Real lace curtains and edges of blue and pink. \$1.98 a set with curtain rods thrown in." She continues, "I like nice things...I always did." To this, Mr. Malloy responds, "for Christ's sake, what are we going to do with curtains? We got no windows." In response to this quite sensible question, Mrs. Malloy "crie[s] and crie[s]...and sob[s]" (48-49). The next day, Mr. Malloy sets out to discover what kind of glue is necessary to "stick cloth to iron" (51). It is implied that Mrs. Malloy got her curtains in the end.

Dwight Goddard does, of course, relate a message about the materialistic wants of people in his version of Taoism. Once a person begins to acquire possessions, he writes, "greed and grasping arise, and, unless one understands when to stop, there will be no satisfying the desires" (43). Mrs. Malloy is miserable and trapped because of her need to fulfill her desires for material things. Mr. Malloy likewise is unhappy and overwhelmed because of his yearning to please his wife. When they had nothing, and lived in utter poverty, they were happy. Once he begins to acquire money, and she uses this money to purchase items for their home, they are no longer able to experience contentedness because Mrs. Malloy wants unnecessary items for her home,

and Mr. Malloy feels a desire to provide well for her. Neither can ever fulfill their wants. Thus, while Mrs. Malloy seems ridiculous in her quest for more and more goods, Mr. Malloy seems equally ridiculous in his desire to appease his wife's insatiable hunger for commodities.

The third married couple presented in Cannery Row is Gay, and his wife, who is only known as Mrs. Gay. Again, these characters seem to be introduced only for Steinbeck to convey the utter horror of the institution of marriage. Mr. Gay is known throughout the Row as the guy who gets beat up by his wife. She is known to hit him repeatedly, and then have him arrested for abuse. Mack comments:

"You just can't trust a married guy. No matter how much he hates his old lady, why he'll go back to her. Get to thinkin' and broodin' and back he'll go. You can't trust him no more. Take Gay...His old lady hits him...But, when Gay's away from her three days, he gets it figured out that its his fault and he goes back to make it up to her." (80)

Gay values his marriage to a fault, and the other men of Cannery Row have less respect for him because of this. Steinbeck describes Gay as "the little mechanic of God, the

St. Francis of all things that turn and twist and explode" (65). He loves to work on cars, and is very good at it. But, he must do so behind the watchful eye of his wife, who doesn't want him wasting his time. He turns from that which he is good at, the hobby which seems to be in his nature, so that he may please his wife. He is humble, yet he serves as a contrast to Mack and the boys. Gay, instead, is humble to a fault, allowing himself to be imprisoned by his own marriage.

Finally, in what seems to be a final blow to the institution of marriage, Mack and the boys meet a man in the woods called the captain. The captain, at first, seems like an angry man, but the boys soon discover that he is simply lonely. He is denied the freedom of male bonding because of his wife. However, it is soon discovered that the captain's cruel wife is away. When he invites the boys into his house, they:

...stood in the kitchen and gathered quick impressions. It was obvious that the wife was away - the opened cans, the frying pans with lace from fried eggs still sticking to it, the crumbs on the kitchen table, the open box of shotgun shells on the bread box all shrieked of the lack

of a woman, while the white curtains and the papers on the dish shelves and the two small towels on the rack told them a woman had been there. And they were...glad she wasn't there. The kind of woman who puts papers on shelves and had little towels like that instinctively distrusted and disliked Mack and the boys. Such women knew that they were the worst threats to a home, for they offered ease and thought and companionship as opposed to neatness, order and properness. They were very glad she was away.

(90)

To accept Taoism is to accept chaos and embrace it. Yet, the captain's wife seems to embody everything that is the opposite of Taoist thought. She stands for the burdens of responsibility whereas Mack and the boys represent freedom. The lonely captain brings out an old bottle of whiskey to share with Mack and the boys, and admits that he loves to drink, but his wife won't let him. Steinbeck continues:

It is doubtful whether the captain ever had so much fun. He was indebted to Mack and the boys. Later when the curtains caught fire and were put out with the little towels, the captain told the

boys not to mind it. He felt it was an honor to have them burn his house clear down, if they wanted to. "My wife...[o]ught to have been a man. If she was a man I wouldn' of married her." ...He filled a jug with whiskey and gave it to Mack. He wanted to go live with them in the Palace Flophouse. (94)

To say that Mack and the boys possess freedom because they do not work was not enough for Steinbeck. Mack and the boys literally encompass a freedom from all responsibility. This includes the responsibility of marriage. And the captain makes it clear that he regrets marrying his wife; thus, he wishes she had been a man. After the captain passes out, Mack and the boys return to their carefree lives at the Palace Flophouse. "I don't think I ever had such a fine trip," Mack freely comments. But this comment is juxtaposed with another reality, "But I got to thinkin' about his wife comin' back and it gives me the shivers" (95).

Repeatedly, Steinbeck uses a westernized image of the controlling housewife who wants to spend a hard-working man's money to teach a lesson in Taoism. Liquor costs money, but for Steinbeck's characters it has a definite

use. It induces a state of casual relaxation, and, in general, provides for a good time. This is repeatedly preached in Cannery Row. Frilly curtains, on the other hand, serve no real purpose, at least in the eyes of Steinbeck. And in the novel, the women who covet things like lace and decorations for the home are always married, always miserable, and always use their powers to keep their husbands away from the freedoms of a Taoist existence.

Undoubtedly, marriage could be considered an obstacle to the pursuit of freedom; thus, one could say marriage is counter-productive to one who is seeking a Taoist life. Marriage is an attachment, and even Laotzu instructs that attachments are harmful to the spirit. Marriage, in fact, could be viewed as an institution set forth by societal norms and morals, and that which society deems acceptable is usually in some way a hindrance to the ways of Taoism. And a true Taoist should never remain in a situation that was unpleasant for him or her, since one ultimate goal of every Taoist should be to attain a complete "freedom from suffering" (Jiang).

Still, this conclusion about marriage is one that Steinbeck seems to have arrived at on his own accord. Goddard imparts nothing of the establishment of marriage.

Borel writes of the falsities of sexual desires, but actually records that the Sage of Shein Shan praises marriage, calling it a beautiful image of two people, who knowingly or unknowingly seek unity with Tao, and in doing so, "clasp one another by the hand, and move on through life, swayed by the same impulse, towards the same goal...like two white clouds floating softly side by side...into the infinite blue of the heavens" (112). On the contrary, Steinbeck imparts the message that men and women make each other miserable. Steinbeck criticizes women in the text, yet even more so, Steinbeck seems to criticize the American idea of marriage and family, displaying it as a gross bondage between two people that literally sucks the joy out of both man and woman. Steinbeck uses the ideology of Taoism to make the reader stop and ask why people marry. If, as may be the case for some, the reader responds to this dilemma by answering that marriage is a necessity because that is what we are supposed to do, perhaps Steinbeck's book serves as a criticism of such a belief, just as Laotzu commands "we should free ourselves from worldly entanglements" by being "personally disinterested" (27).

CHAPTER SIX

"TOO MUCH THE WRITER FOR THE COMMON AMERICAN":

STEINBECK'S WRITING AS A METAPHOR OF TAOISM

In November of 1944, Steinbeck wrote of Cannery Row, "The ideal is to be banned by everybody - then everybody would have to read it" ("Letters" 276). And despite the controversy surrounding the text, or perhaps because of the hullabaloo, Cannery Row has remained popular amongst the American public.

In studying the responses of Steinbeck scholars and the personal comments of Steinbeck enthusiasts, the wisdom of a given readers' emotional reactions to Cannery Row is interesting when one considers the text as thematically Taoist. Brian Railsback maintains that within the text of Cannery Row is an ideology that seems to suggest that the key to satisfaction in our chaotic world is to "embrac[e] the disorder and especially the paradoxes that life and the universe present to us" (287). He continues by noting that Steinbeck seems to convey the ultimate message that "if we move beyond our own boundaries, we might sense an unseen order in things and therefore we may allow ourselves to stand before the universe without raging for order...when

we cannot discern an order to our liking" (293). Richard Astro writes that Cannery Row may be a warning of the "plague" of "materialistic Americans who are blind to the ecological truths of nature and to the...structure of life, but who, because of their unremitting possessiveness...may ultimately inherit the entire world" (167) only to bring about "the inevitable demise of the good man" (169). Noboru Simomura writes that in Cannery Row, Steinbeck appears to have "expressed more sympathy with the life of bums, and he rather seems to have tried to advocate it" (119). P. Balaswamy responds to Steinbeck by stating that he is an instructor of "tunes and tones that create harmonious relationships among people and nations of the world" (107). Ian Vance, who posted his personal response to Cannery Row on Amazon.com, claims to have learned from the text "the true meaning of wealth [which involves] enjoying what you have rather than fretting about what you do not [and] minimizing negative stress." Michael R., a high school freshman, writes, "Cannery Row is about how people that seem the lowest of the low are actually the greatest...and how people seen as pathetic are actually the most successful people of all." This list of comments, while by no means exhaustive, demonstrates an important

point. Readers understand the pervading themes of this text. And although a reader's perception of Steinbeck's message in Cannery Row may not be readily perceived by that given reader as being Taoist, the various interpretations of his message remains overwhelmingly consistent with Taoism, none the less. While public responses to translations of the Tao Teh Ching often involve the adjectives "difficult," "confusing," and "impossible," Steinbeck's storytelling seems to have triumphed in reaching the general modern audience in a way that Laotzu's complex metaphors quite simply cannot.

Yet, the question still remains: if Steinbeck in fact purposely set out to write a Taoist manuscript, why did he keep his intentions for the text a secret? The controversy surrounding the text may have made the text more popular with a certain crowd. However, for the most part, the reactions to the book brought him scorn and resentment from his friends and neighbors in Monterey County, requiring him to relocate to the opposite end of the United States. Steinbeck wrote, "They want no part of me except in a pine box" ("Letters" 467). The book caused several years of harassment from government officials who believed him to be a Communist. Extensive F.B.I. files were kept on him, and

his privacy was invaded on numerous occasions (John Steinbeck; Benson 406, 504). Several possibilities for Steinbeck's silence seem possible.

On one hand, it is pleasant to consider the Taoist text as solely being a tribute to Ricketts, written only for him as a gift, or perhaps as a personal challenge set forth by Ricketts himself. Yet since the novel was, in fact, published and mass-produced, this does not seem to be entirely the case. A more reasonable probability seems to be that for the sake of financial gain, or to get the message of the benefits of simplicity to the widest number of readers, it would not have likely been profitable in the 1940's for Steinbeck to release an openly Taoist document. Carlos Moreno, in his study of American perceptions of Taoism in the 1940's writes that during this time "everything different was judged as 'inferior.' In particular...Eastern cultures...did not escape that glance." In fact, during this time, Moreno claims that a commonly held belief was that "the Chinese language is incapable of being logical," and in particular, Asian religions were often scoffed at in the United States. While China and U.S. relations certainly improved in 1941 when the two countries became allies in World War II, John

Major, who studies American opinions of Chinese Americans, writes that, during the 1940's, the U.S. had a belief that while China was most certainly "deserving of our sympathy" there was none the less a fear of "the yellow peril (a phrase popularized by Jack London), resurrected with fears of Bolshevism" (4). Additionally, while the 1940's experienced a rush of Chinese Americans portrayed in popular media, these images remained stereotypical and even racist, depicting the Chinese American as either "sinister, threatening [and] violent" or "ridiculous, pompous [and] comical" (5). Undoubtedly, a book that was openly written about Taoism, a philosophy not widely established in the states during the 1940's and certainly not readily accepted, would have likely served little purpose other than to collect dust.

Still, despite remaining racist attitudes towards the Chinese culture, it still seems that Steinbeck would have fared better by announcing the text to be Taoist in theme after having been accused of being a Communist. Following the release of Cannery Row, nobody in Monterey "would rent Steinbeck an office in which to work...[and] people would cross the street rather than pass him on the sidewalk" (John Steinbeck). While there is no indication that

Steinbeck was, in fact, a Communist, he humbly allowed such accusations to remain and retreated from his own home state, rather than defending or explaining the text of Cannery Row. Upon his decision to move, he wrote to his editor, "California isn't my country any more, and it won't be until I am dead. It makes me very sad" (qtd. in John Steinbeck). Perhaps one reason Steinbeck did not defend Cannery Row is, itself, Taoist in nature. The Goddard translation of the Tao Teh Ching is explicit in its discussion of the teaching of Taoism.

Since Taoism, as a philosophy, does not involve a god but rather a recognition and acceptance of the natural and paradoxical order and disorder in all things, there is no need for worship or specific ceremony. One who knows of or even practices Taoism may not in fact be "akin to Tao" if he or she does not live the proper lifestyle. However, what separates Taoism from many religious and philosophical ideologies is that one who knows nothing of Tao but lives simplistically and with acceptance of all things can still be considered to be "akin to Tao" without having any knowledge of what Taoism is. In fact, the Tao Teh Ching begins by diminishing the philosophy's ability to be taught. The Tao that can be spoken of "cannot be the

infinite Tao" and "the way that can be followed can not be the ultimate, pathless Way" (25). Thus, teaching people about Tao, can be unnecessary and even contradictory to a teacher's goals. This surely would have been the case for Steinbeck, who was able to successfully reach his American readers via a story about hobos and roustabouts, but would have almost certainly failed had he tried to preach Taoism to them directly.

Goddard's translation instructs those who wish to teach Taoism to avoid making any "invidious comparisons in teaching his people" (26). Since those who live simply are often the ones who are most ready for Taoism, trying to explain to them a difficult philosophy could spur within them a desire for knowledge. Much like the effects of Eve's consumption of the apple, coercing those who live simply to study the ways of Taoism and become mindful of ideas could have effects adverse to the ways of the Tao. According to Laotzu, when "knowledge and learning are cultivated there is hypocrisy." However, when people "abandon" their ambition for "knowledge and learning, then their innate goodness will have a chance to manifest itself and will develop a hundredfold" (34).

Therefore, Steinbeck's novels provide the perfect

vehicle for Taoist philosophy, though certainly not because Steinbeck is a wise Taoist sage. Rather, because his stories were never intended for scholars, critics, or philosophers but were written with the common folk in mind, Steinbeck becomes the ideal Taoist instructor. Playwright, Terrance McNally recalls that while attending Columbia University, a student was "forbidden to utter John Steinbeck" in association with "American literature" (qtd. in John Steinbeck). In fact, even as Steinbeck's work gains momentum in the world of academia, critics such as Henry Kirsor continue to point out that Steinbeck will never receive the full attention of scholars because he remains "too much the writer for the common American" a title which Laotzu would have likely found to be very well suited for one wishing to teach the facets of Taoism.

In fact, the very best teacher of Taoism should have no desire to "take and remake the empire" or to "enforce his own ideas upon it." One who truly wishes to have his or her people follow the ways of Taoism should reveal "to the nation an example of returning to simplicity" (Laotzu 41), and just such simplicity is ever present in Steinbeck's depiction of the no-goods and blots on the town who call Cannery Row their home. Laotzu continues to

instruct that Taoism cannot possibly be conveyed through words alone, since although "fine words are used in selling goods" it is truly "a noble life that wins the respect of others" (60). There is unquestionable nobility in the characters Steinbeck creates, as is evident throughout both Cannery Row and The God in the Pipes.

And perhaps because Steinbeck's stories remain on the outskirts of academia, they still serve their intended purpose of reaching the common audience. Thus, Cannery Row when considered as a book that tells a good story about some hobos and drunks, becomes Steinbeck's most important transformation of a Taoist metaphor turned concrete. Other Taoist texts fail at implementing the idea of "teaching by not teaching" because they reveal themselves to be Taoist, thus creating anxiety and aversion in their intended audience, who may not have any desire to seek enlightenment nor an understanding of one of the oldest philosophies in history. In fact, a blatantly Taoist-American text would be likely to draw a predominately elite audience, and thus, an audience not typically well-suited for true Taoism. Yet, each time Cannery Row is opened for the purpose of sheer entertainment, there is the potential for that reader to adopt, or at least understand, some of the facets of

Taoism without even realizing he or she has done so. The words on the page, with all of their rough edges and loutish depictions of excessive drinking and prostitutes, provide the concrete subliminal message that is able to reach those who are brilliantly simple enough to learn of Tao, but perhaps unwilling or unable to discover its suitability via a complex text such as the Tao Teh Ching.

And finally, this secret meaning of Cannery Row has allowed Steinbeck himself to become a concrete image of Laotzu's metaphorical perfect sage. While it was certainly true that Cannery Row would have caused Steinbeck significantly less grief had he explained that it was "yellow" and not "red," the fact remains that he did not come clean. Thus, when he quietly moved to New York, he remained true to Laotzu's description of how a perfect sage should feel: "I, alone, am neglected...I am content to remain retiring and obscure...let me remain as neglected as a deaf mute...I am content to be counted foolish and inefficient" (36). And ultimately, even to his death, Steinbeck retained at least one element of Laotzu's description of a true pilot of Taoism, by keeping his own understanding of "Tao, like a gem, hidden," (64) simply letting his stories teach his philosophies, while he

remained, as critic Harry Smith maintains, "a dissident in his own time whose voice resonated through America's soul."

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