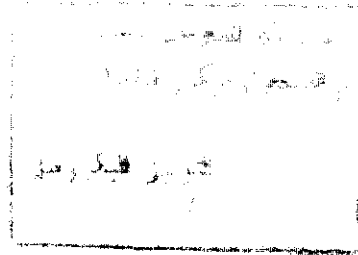


Ain Shams University.
Faculty of Arts.
English Department.



RECOGNITION AND REVERSAL IN JOHN STEINBECK'S
COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES:
THE LONG VALLEY.



A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the
M. A. Degree.

By

Abeer Mostafa El-Gamal.



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A. H

Under the Supervision of:

Dr. Sarah Rashwan.

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January, 1992.

”بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Sarah Rashwan for the great efforts she exerted during preparing this thesis. I wish also to thank her for her guidance and sound advice which made the writing of this thesis possible.

I am greatly indebted to all the people who have contributed in the accomplishment of this work. Special mention should be made to the librarians of The American Studies Research Center in Hyderabad for their assistance.

To my husband, daughter, and my family, no words are adequate to describe their sacrifice in helping me complete this work.

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Introduction.

John Steinbeck (1902 -1968) is well-known more as a novelist, than as a short-story-writer. Steinbeck began writing short stories when he was at secondary school, and he continued to write them throughout his career, even after his reputation as a great novelist was firmly established. He said on more than one occasion that the short story form appealed to him. This explains why some of his early novels, such as The Pastures of Heaven (1932), Tortilla Flat (1935), have episodic structures, which make them closer to the short story form than to the novel.

During his life time, Steinbeck produced more than fifty stories. However, only fifteen were collected and published in a short story collection, The Long Valley (1938). Most of the stories of the 1940's and 50's are published in different magazines and newspapers; while some of the early stories are still in manuscripts. Other stories are scattered as interchapters in some of his novels and non-fictional works.

Critics almost unanimously agree that The Long Valley stories are among the best he has ever written. They are not only marked by their artistic excellence and depth of characterization, but also by their variety of themes. The stories deal with some of the subjects Steinbeck was

interested in throughout his life, and reveal many of the elements influencing his work. Therefore, dealing with this collection allows us to get an overall picture of Steinbeck's work.

This thesis attempts to point out Steinbeck's skill in characterization, concentrating on the techniques of recognition and reversal which he often uses in these stories. Recognition has to do with the character's ability to acquire knowledge about himself, or about the world around him, which he did not possess before. Reversal refers to the way a character changes or adapts to the knowledge he acquires. Steinbeck employs these two techniques, in addition to other techniques of characterization, to develop his characters, and to render them life-like and individual.

The first chapter "Steinbeck: The Man and Artist", concentrates on Steinbeck's life and its influence on his art. His native country, Salinas, California, his family, education, and his varied career before he became a writer, all influenced his work, and especially the way he portrays his characters. Throughout his life, Steinbeck was physically and spiritually bound to Salinas; he loved the place and its inhabitants. Therefore, most of his characters in The Long Valley are modelled on the real people he knew and loved in his native land, and this adds a

touch of reality to them. In addition, Steinbeck's education and intellectual interests had considerable influence on his work. He studied literature and biology at Stanford University, and was greatly interested in psychology. All three fields left their print on his work and characters. They helped him to view his characters from different, but related perspectives: as a man of letters, as a biologist, and as a psycho-analyst. Chapter one attempts to point out the links between Steinbeck's background and his work, in general and his characters, in particular.

Chapter two, "Recognition and Reversal: Techniques Essential to Character Portrayal" examines and defines these terms. First, we present Aristotle's definition of them, since he was the first to point out their importance. Second we give James Joyce's definition which is slightly different and more related to modern literature, especially to the short story form. The second part of this chapter attempts to point out how relevant these techniques are to the modern short story. This is achieved through tracing how they are employed by some of the masters of the short story, thus paving the way for the discussion of Steinbeck's stories in the second part of the thesis. Chapters three and four attempt a critical analysis of the characters in The Long Valley, concentrating on how they come to recognize the truth, and how they go through reversal.

In chapter three "Recognition and Reversal Applied to Femal and Male Characters" we deal with these two groups of characters in ten of The Long Valley stories whose central characters are mature adults, both men and women. In analyzing these characters, we stress how they acquire knowledge, about themselves or about the world around them, and how they change or develop in accordance with this knowledge. The moment of recognition is often the result of a long struggle, psychological or social or both. Through this struggle Steinbeck goes deeply into the minds and hearts of his characters, presenting a penetrating, psychological analysis of them. When a character finally comes to reach the truth about himself and to face his points of weakness, he is ready for a change, or a development in his personality or a different attitude to life. This does not mean that all the characters automatically change, when they discover new and significant facts which were hidden before. Some characters remain changeless and passive even after they acquire knowledge.

Chapter four, "Recognition and Reversal with Reference to Children and Old People", also examines how Steinbeck applies these techniques to these two groups of characters. In five of the stories in The Long Valley the central characters are children and old people; and Steinbeck manages to portray them admirably, and to point out the

essential differences between children and aged people, employing the same techniques in question. The chapter traces the development of two boys, Jody in the four stories which were later collected as The Red Pony and Pepé in "Flight". These two boys go through different stages of development and maturity as a result of a series of recognitions through which they acquire knowledge about life and the world. Thus, they finally achieve a reversal from the naive world of childhood, to the world of maturity and experience.

In contrast to these two dynamic young characters, who easily adapt their lives to the knowledge they acquire, Steinbeck presents two old, inflexible men. These are Grandfather and Gitano, who go through recognition, but find it hard to change. Thus, Steinbeck indirectly comments on the essential differences between these two generations: the young who are enthusiastic and capable of change, and the old who spend the rest of their lives passively, waiting for death.

As we discuss Steinbeck's characters in The Long Valley we are impressed by the way they are portrayed as vivid and believable people. They act, think and feel just like real people in similar situations. The conclusion attempts to stress Steinbeck's skill in portraying his characters, and his use of recognition and reversal, which best suit his

task. Steinbeck handles these techniques masterly and in various ways that suit different characters. Therefore, his characters behave as flesh and blood individuals, not types or static figures. The conclusion sums these ideas up in an attempt to refute the accusation that Steinbeck often looked at his creations as a biologist concentrating on their animal aspect, and neglecting their individuality and psychological make-up. The conclusion also debates the idea that he treats his characters from the point of view of a proletarian, who sees man only as a member of society not as an independent individual. In a word, it points out Steinbeck's skill in portraying life-like characters, and in applying recognition and reversal to different sorts of characters of various ages.

Chapter 1 :

Steinbeck: The Man and Artist.

John Ernest Steinbeck (1902 - 1962) is one of America's most popular writers. His novels and short stories have always appealed to readers and attracted a large and varied volume of criticism. Critics disagree as to the meanings underlying his work and this causes them to have different and sometimes, contradictory views. Each group of critics interprets his work according to its concentration on one only of its various angles, and builds its criticism accordingly. In other words , each group of critics sees his work from a particular angle and disregards other aspects which are equally important to the complete evaluation of his work. For example some critics concentrate only on his interest in science and his knowledge of biology, including his concept of man. This leads to misinterpreting his work, and accusing him of observing the animal part of man, and of being unable to create human, life-like characters.

Other critics misinterpret his sympathy with the poor and the needy, and label him a socialist. Thus, they read social criticism forcibly in all his works though this constitutes only one element in them. According to this group, Steinbeck's characters fail to be individuals, they are only cogs in the machine of society, merely social animals, who act as parts of the group not as independent

individuals. This sociological bias leads such critics to disregard Steinbeck's skill in portraying psychologically integrated characters.

Another group of critics magnified the role played by his native land in his work believing him to be a regionalist. They think that he cannot write well unless he is writing about his own country, California. Each of the above-mentioned schools of critics obscure the considerable accomplishment of Steinbeck's fiction since they could not see it as a whole with all these elements, the personal, biological, social and natural, which are tightly and harmoniously woven together. According to Joseph Fontenrose, these diverse critical opinions on Steinbeck's work testify to his greatness as a writer :

If it is one criterion of greatness in a writer that no critic can comprehend the whole of his work or even say the last word about it, then Steinbeck is surely a great writer and there will be no end to Steinbeck criticism, since every critical writer will judge his work from a different view point¹.

This chapter attempts a quick, comprehensive view of his personal life, the role played by his native land California in his work, his biological ideas, his social interest and his knowledge of psychology.