

## The Dialectics of ‘Depravity’ in Steinbeck’s *Tortilla Flat*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate the dialectics of depravity in John Steinbeck’s *Tortilla Flat*. Critics have long debated the technicalities by which Steinbeck conveys the thematic issues associated with his literary works. In *Tortilla Flat* in particular, there are various stories that do not have a common theme or argument. Readers, we expect an argument that holds the action and centers it on the characters, the setting, and theme. This paper reveals that the issue of depravity and deprivation found in *Tortilla Flat* cannot be easily judged despite the astonishing unity which is as much thematic as structural. The characters are portrayed as innocents, primitives, irresponsible, tender, and brutal at the same time. Loneliness, idealism, and the negative attitude to property denote a love of freedom and a carefree existence that distinguish his characters. Eventually, readers would be fully justified in treating this aspect of characterization as a very realistic and insightful study of an extremely important facet of human psychology. Nevertheless, Steinbeck strives to expose an innate goodness and a deep sensation of humanity within his “depraved” and “deprived” characters. The possibility of interpreting the whole work in several ways as we could be deceived by the ending of *Tortilla Flat*.

**Key words:** Technicalities, Characterization, Depravity, Deprivation, Circumstances, Goodness

### INTRODUCTION

As the publication of *Tortilla Flat* made John Steinbeck’s name on the literary scene, critics have abundantly made much of Steinbeck’s remarks, while talking about. Steinbeck (1975) happened to write to Mavis McIntosh, his agent, that ‘some fine little things’ had happened in a big sugar mill where he was Assistant Chief Chemist. He recounts stories about an ex-corporal of the Mexican cavalry and his personal tragedy; about an Indian; the saga of the Carriage family. ‘These are a few as they really happened. I could make some little stories of them I thinking’ (JS-MM., 1/33). Although this does suggest that he drew heavily on actual incidents there is reason to believe that as far as *Tortilla Flat* was concerned he probably included other incidents narrated to him by Susan Gregory, a longtime resident of Monterey, to whom the book is dedicated (Moore, 30).

In addition to giving the origin for two of the stories in *Tortilla Flat*, the very letter, addressed to Mavis McIntosh, provides an understanding to Steinbeck’s method—his tendency to think of his material in episodes. This tendency was a source of serious worry in the novelist’s early period, specially when none of his previous novels had been best sellers. Reminding Steinbeck that *The Pastures of Heaven*, the previous novel, had not sold because it was merely a collection of short stories and that *Tortilla Flat* seemed the same,

Robert O. Ballou, his publisher, urged him to think a little more seriously: “If *Tortilla Flat* were to my mind an important book and one which is representative of what you have to say, I would be the first to say, ‘the hell with the critics and the public’, but it isn’t an important book and it doesn’t add to your stature as a novelist. My feeling of disappointment at the end of it lay in the fact that all the way through I had been looking and looking and waiting for some important story argument and found it nowhere” (RB-JS, 1/10/34). Even Steinbeck’s agents thought that the book needed, “something to hold it together”.

With regard to the theme of the novel also Steinbeck was to draw parallels which critics made much of. Steinbeck wrote to his agents an answer to various critical remarks:

The book has a very definite theme. I thought it was clear enough. I have expected that the plan of the Arthurian cycle would be recognized .... The form is that of the Malory version. (JS-MM, Winter, 1935) (Life in Letters, 96)

Steinbeck’s mention of the Arthurian legend gave rise to a spate of criticism expanding the parallels—as a matter of fact to much ingenuity has been expended in pointing these out. The point that was paid little attention to was what Steinbeck had said a little later in the letter: “The main issue was to present a little known and, to me, delightful people”, (JS-MM, Winter, 1934). So Steinbeck’s main objective was to present these people who are “clean of commercialism,

free of the complicated systems of American business". His technique, as he himself explained, was to put a narrator who, between incidents, interprets the incidents "morally, esthetically, historically". Steinbeck thought that such a technique would make clear both the "tragic-comic theme" of the novel and the "strong but different philosophic-moral system of these people".

## DISCUSSION

*Tortilla Flat* does, at first sight, appear to have a loose construction like *The Pastures of Heaven*: several stories set within a frame and written about the same people. But, as Joseph Fontenrose (1963) has pointed out that: "It is, in fact, much more tightly constructed. Every story has the same central characters, Danny and his friends'. We do not move from one family to another as in *The Pastures*. And it has a perceptible plot with a gradual rise and a swifter fell" (31). In the same direction, Peter Lisca (1978) too is of the opinion that *Tortilla Flat* is not just a 'sketchbook'. He says: "More important than any unity of action given to the book by a superficial resemblance to the Morte D'Arthur is the unity of tone and style which makes more clear and effective what Steinbeck called "the strong but different philosophic moral system of these people" and the book's "tragic-comic theme"(79).

Unfortunately, this moral system is nearly always overlooked. Lincoln R. Gibbs (1942) calls *Tortilla Flat* "an extravaganza with a good deal of slapstick comedy, a touch of parody (of the Morte D'Arthur), and many examples of the author's innuendo" (95). Gibbs goes on further to call it a "gay trifle .... a late addition to picaresque fiction". This sort of critical analyses is representative of a good many critics. But this was not what Steinbeck intended; he wanted it be taken seriously. Warren French (1961) does that when he says: "The point of *Tortilla Flat* is principally that the way of life of the 'bums'- as respectable people might learn something from:' but the novel is also partially a warning that the simple life close to nature that some men long for is not the answer to the problems of either society or the individual. Steinbeck is here-as elsewhere not so much exalting the have-nots as attacking the haves" (61). In the present paper, the 'haves', it has been argued, are the 'depraved' and the have-nots the deprived.

Wilbut M. Frohock (1947), agrees that the characters who people the world of novels like *Tortilla Flat* have "no commitments to society and no inhibitions worth mentioning." They live a perfectly free life, living by their wits, unconcerned with the moral niceties, capable both of debauched brutality and of great tenderness. But to diagnose this as a preoccupation with primitives is totally misleading, because if they are primitives the word needs to be redefined. Society, not nature, has made them so. In *Tortilla Flat* they are irresponsible and happy and inconsequential because the economic environment has made them so. Frohock says that if these conditions were to be changed we would see an absolutely different side of these people. "Take the people out of the pleasant climate and let the economic environment squeeze instead of tolerate them, and they will be out with

the migrants on Highway 66 and the name of your book will be *The Grapes of Wrath*. Or simply leave them in California and turn the economic set-up against them until they become desperate and angry, and you have a strike on your hands and the name of your book is *In Dubious Battle*" (128). "This point has been usually missed by most critics of Steinbeck, for it is quite obvious that the people of *Tortilla Flat* are indeed the people of his *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*. Moreover, to term *Tortilla Flat* as a popular escapist fantasy is wrong; at best it can be seen as a fable that according to Warren French "sugarcoats a bitter kernel." In this respect, the reception of *Tortilla Flat* has not only been uneven but flawed as well. Considering the intricacy and subtlety of its "philosophic moral system", one would naturally tend to disagree with Edmund Wilson (1940), that these *paisanos* are "human beings so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level", or that they are "cunning little living dolls that amuse us like pet guinea pigs or rabbits"(787). It is also not possible to agree with Freeman Champney (1947) that *Tortilla Flat* shows "man as animal....without any other pretensions"(69).

It is once again Warren French that one turns for the final word:

*Tortilla Flat* is not one of the many tracts that circulated during the Depression advocating that urban Americans return to a simple pastoral quest- a legend, presented in a manner that communicates the remoteness of the life of the *paisanos* from that of most of their compatriots. This legend is climaxed by a catastrophe that reminds us that we cannot escape responsibility for the complications of the worlds we create. *Tortilla Flat* does not contradict Steinbeck's avowal in chapter 4 of *The Grapes of Wrath* that man must move forwards, even if stumblingly and painfully; but it does not clearly indicate that the time he wrote the earlier novel Steinbeck could only envision these efforts as finally frustrated (75).

Superficially, the world of *Tortilla Flat*, at least through the better part of the book, looks very different from the cheerless world depicted in *The Pastures of Heaven*. Superficially also it appears that the characters in the later novel are somewhat different from those in the preceding one. However, in terms of the juxtapositioning of the terms depravity and deprivation, Steinbeck's work displays an astonishing unity which is as much thematic as structural. In fact, this could not be otherwise without doing violence to the integrity of Steinbeck as a writer.

Danny and his friends represent a desire for, and an attempt at, happy, friendly living, though the attempt, because of the peculiar circumstances surrounding them, comes to a sad end: "When you speak of Danny's house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men, from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow" (TF9). The sorrow which befalls Danny and his friends is from the plot point of view unexpected, but in real terms it is both natural and explicable. For, in the world to which these characters belong the dice are always heavily loaded against them and readers end cannot but be sorrowful.

At the very outset, two points strike readers: the element nature of Danny and his friends: "Danny is a nature god

and his friends primitive symbols of the wind, the sky, the sun" (TF 10), and a clear indication of their unspoiled and unsophisticated character: "The paisanos are clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stolen, exploited or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them vigourously" (TF 10).

They are not rebellious and they even try to avoid being disrespectful to the law. What appear as their acts of misadventure and breach of socially approved conduct are those compulsions that hide behind them: an instinct for being good:

Danny's business was fairly direct. He went to the back door of a restaurant. 'Got any old bread I can give my dog?' he asked the cook. And while that gullible man was wrapping up the food, Danny stole two slices of ham, four eggs, a lamb chop, and a fly swatter.

'I will pay you sometime,' he said.

'No Need to pay for scraps, I throw them away if you don't take them.' Danny felt better about the theft then. If that was the way he felt, on the surface he was guiltless. (TF15).

Steinbeck has both directly and indirectly attended to the positive side of the character of Danny and his friends. Significantly, he has invested them with qualities associated only with a clean mind and heart. One such quality is the capacity for a certain refined feeling of loneliness nourished by an untrained memory of things and people gone by. Both Danny and Pilon display it:

And after a time, a loneliness fell upon Danny and Pion. Danny thought of his lost friends.

"Where is Arthur Morales?" Danny asked, turning his palms up and thrusting his arms forwards. 'Dead in France'. He answered himself, turnin the palms down and dropping his arms in despair. 'Dead for his country. Dead in a foreign land. Strangers walk near his grave and they do not know Arthur Morales lies here.' He raised his hands palms upward again. 'Where is Pablo, that good man?'" (TF 17)

There is an unmistakable quality of good health about this kind of feeling of loneliness. What may interpret the appearance of such mind of feeling is the fact that Steinbeck believes in strong bond between people and their emotional connection.

Another striking characteristic of the novel is the presence of more than a suggestion by its author of his belief in some kind of Utopian idealism indicating exaltation of poverty and suspicion of riches:

'It is not the first time,' Pilon went on. 'When one poor, one thinks, "If I had money I would share it with my good friends". But let that money come and charity flies away. So it is with thee, my once friend. Thou art lifted above thy friends. Thou art a man of property. Thou wilt forget thy friends who share everything with thee, even their brandy (TF 19).

Even in the midst of this thwarted ideological thought Danny displays an unequivocal commitment to fraternity and equality: 'Pilon, I swear what I have is thine. While I have a house, thou hast a house (TF 29). And until the end he

is as good as his works. As a natural corollary to the above there is at several places a confirmation of a distrust of property on the part of these folksy characters: Pilon noticed that the worry of property was setting on Danny's face. No more in life would that face be free of care .... 'Pilon', he said sadly. 'I wish you owned it and I could come to live with you'. (TF 21)

The motive behind this negative attitude to property is a positive love of freedom and of a carefree existence, which seem to be innate to these people. Occasionally though even they succumb to the temptations to which the common people are a prey—just an infirmity of not too ignoble a mind. Thus, while bargaining about what the imaginary rent is going to be between Danny and Pilon, the latter grudgingly agreed to figure fifteen. At that point the author says: "But he would have agreed to much more for he saw the elevation that came to a man who lived in his own house; and Pilon longed to feel that elevation". (TF 24)

Throughout there is a pronounced feeling diligently cultivated that there is a certain kind of unspoiled simplicity which belongs to those who are from another angle drop-outs of society, people like Pilon and Pablo. One facet of this simplicity is an instinctive aversion to commercialized living. "it is impossible to say whether Danny expected any rent, or whether Pilon expected to pay any. If they did, both were disappointed. Danny never asked for it and Pilon never offered it". (TF 26)

Even allowing for an element of irony or gentle banter the fact remains that in Steinbeck's eyes characters like Pilon were not reprehensible people deserving censure. "Pilon was an honest man. It worried him some time to think of Danny's goodness and his own poverty". (TF 26). It would not indeed be wide off the mark to maintain that this sub world, as it were, of Steinbeck's fiction is purposively endowed by its author an incapacity to think deeply and imaginatively (this incapacity is part of what can be called 'biological deprivation'). The many acts of omission and commission associated with those who people this world are therefore superficially instances of depravity, but traced to their origin and judged according to their germination they become a sad and even critical commentary on those factors, both human and institutional, which lie at the root of it. It is again this very reason which gives rise to many distortions and aberrations of behaviour, which is easily justified by those indulging in it through resort to what again superficially appears to be dishonest thinking but which, as explained above, is a natural outcome of forced circumstances.

Another interesting fact is the attribution of rather unusual qualities to those who otherwise look like being devoid of anything good and positive. Who would, for example, think of Pilon as 'a lover of beauty and a mystic', (TF 8) who could undergo an experience generally vouchsafed only for the poets and seers, like raising one's face into the sky and letting one's soul arise out of oneself into the sun's afterglow? Further, Pilon displays a surprising quality of robust common-sense and very subtle though effective humour. Pablo told him that Ruiz was always a liar and that his soul would need plenty of masses. But Pablo also wondered if a mass had any virtue when the money for that mass came out of men's



pockets while they indulged in sin. Pilon had a wonderful answer." A mass is a mass', said Pilon. "Where you get two bits is no interest to the man who sells you a glass of wine. And where a mass comes from is of no interest to God. He just likes them, the same as you like wine." (TF 36)

One could go a step further and say that every effort has been made by Steinbeck to invest Pilon and others of his kind with a certain guiltless disposition which can, if viewed charitably, pass for innocence. It is manifested in many ways, one of which being an unselfconscious self-deception as a rationalization for unworthy deeds. On being reminded of the rent due to them, Pilon leaves Danny in a fit of put on anger and also takes Pablo also away with him saying that they would arrange to get money to pay to the miserly Jew that Danny was:

'We will call him, "Old Jew" when we see him,' said Pilon. 'We have been his friends for years. When he was in need, we fed him. When he was cold, we clothed him. 'When was that', Pablo asked.

'Well, we would have, if he needed anything and we had it. That is the kind of friends we were to him. And now he crushes our friendship into the ground for a box of big candy to give to an old fat woman. (TF 39)

Steinbeck himself has given enough indication to show the real nature of emotional outbursts of this wonderful lot of his own creation. Readers would be fully justified in treating this aspect of characterization as a very realistic and insightful study of an extremely important facet of human psychology. Steinbeck's use of the word conventional in this context is very innovative. Talking of Danny he says:

He had indulged in a little conventional anger against careless friends, had mourned for a movement over that transitory quality of earthly property which made spiritual property so much more valuable. He had thought over the ruin of his status as a man with a house of rent; and all this clutter of necessary and descent emotion, having been satisfied and swept away, he had finally slipped into his true emotion, one of relief that at least one of his burdens was removed. (TF 59)

So all the anger as well as other related emotions are a kind of dress which one puts on to suit an occasion, and then as soon as the occasion is over one puts it off. It is, as it were, passing through the motions of an effective behaviour. Such people with the kind of emotional life they lead are simply outside the pale of highbrow morality. It is for this reason that these deprived people stand completely disqualified as candidates of depravity. Temperamentally and intrinsically they are untarnished by the seduction of material acquisition and given half a chance they would most happily return to their 'state of nature'. The conflict between the essential self and the acquired self is very transient and the outcome is not in the least uncertain. The inexorable logic of their instincts asserts most powerfully and restores them to their original selves.

One of the most interesting episodes in *Tortilla Flat* is that relating to Pirate. In many ways it serves as the best commentary on Steinbeck's own understanding of these *paisanos*. The need for the money is strongly felt by Pilon. His promise to feed Danny as usual came in handy as an excuse

to rob the Pirate of his hoard. Pilon was fully aware of the hard life that the Pirate led. The latter's habit of saving his daily earning of a twenty five cent piece could hardly invite censure or envy. But Pilon's logic was his own and he could twist anything to suit that logic. The Pirate was a poor half-formed creature with no brains at all. It would be an act of utmost charity to deprive him of his savings which he did not have the ability to look after: "The Pirate has money, but he has not the brain to use it. I have the brain! I will give freely of my mind. That shall be my charity towards this poor little half-made man". (TF 70)

Steinbeck never misses an opportunity to bring out the innate goodness of his 'depraved' and 'deprived' characters. On being told that he was a worry to his friends the Pirate, perhaps for the first time in his life, was completely overwhelmed and overtaken by emotion. It was such a touching thought that he had so many friends who could feel worried on account of his sad plight. He would have done his best to avoid worrying them if only he knew of it. "He swallowed to clear his throat of emotion. 'You see, Pilon, the dogs like it here. And I like it because of them. I did not think I was a worry to my friends.' Tears came into Pirate's eyes". (TF 74). This is humanity at its best, and its worth increases manifold since it is an unusual within the bosom of a deprived person.

That it is not an occurrence of goodness is obvious from the way Steinbeck has treated the Pirate's character in the rest of the story, always bringing out the best in him whenever an occasion offered itself. For example, once he had found himself a home at Danny's he would go on his daily rounds of the restaurants and wharves and make a gift of all his collections to his friends "and their acceptance of his gifts touched the Pirate more deeply than anything they could have done for him. There was a light of worship in his eyes as he watched them eat the food he brought". (TF 79). In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that Steinbeck is consciously striving to make the point that *paisanos* are, their distasteful exterior notwithstanding, unmistakably imbued with noble instincts and idealism. For example, all the idealism in Pilon comes out when he informs Big Joe Portagee that the treasure he was trying to dig was not meant for him but for Danny. He went on to laud Danny by contrasting Danny's virtues with the vices of his friends including Pilon himself. One might get the impression that all the noble sentiments voiced by Pilon are sheer hypocrisy and hysterics but such an impression would be unsustainable, as when asked Joe if he would not keep even a small fraction of the treasure, not even for a gallon of wine with him, Pilon replied, "No, not one scrap of gold 'Not one little brown penny' It's all for Danny, every bit." In Steinbeck's own words, "Pilon had no speck of the bad Pilon in him this night. (TF 94).

Perhaps the most striking episode in *Tortilla Flat* bringing out at once the primitiveness of behavior for honour and virtue in the *paisanos* is that relating to the attempted stealing of the Pirate's savings by Big Joe and its ultimate resolution. The horrid details of the various ways in which punishment is meted out to big Joe Pilon, Pablo and Danny are at one level a clear indication of undomesticated animality and at another they become a prelude to the revelation

of the basic goodness of the human heart which has a compulsive character and which cries out for the restoration of the moral equilibrium resulting in a kind of poetic justice through the rehabilitation of original piety. A kind of dramatic contrast is built into the structure of the episode which is given a natural culmination in the form of an epiphanic experience. "The Pirate felt that he had been washed in a golden fluid of beatitude. Little chills and fevers of pleasure chased one another through his body. (TF 146). This feeling of a religious kind takes on a sustained form assuming first the nature of an image and later that a symbol. No intelligent reader can miss the symbolic character of the story of the dog made part of the church service by Father Ramon. It is worth remembering that it all started with the hurt dog who through a miracle sent by the good Saint Francis overcame his hurt and led the Pirate to vow that he would offer a candlestick to the protector Saint. The life of the Pirate revolved round the dogs and even as the ceremony offering the promised candlestick to the Saint was going on the most prominent motif behind it all remained that of the dogs. The wheel comes full circle, as it were, when the Pirate almost as a sacred duty and as part of the unfinished ceremony deems it fit to et together his four dogs and relate to them with utmost piety and earnestness the details of what transpired at the time of the church ceremony!

There is something about the end of the novel. One thing that makes it unquestionably out of the ordinary is the possibility of its being interpreted in several ways. In fact, the end is deceptively traditional. How can it be described? Is it that the novel ends as a tragic outcome, Danny dying and his friends disintegrating amidst the ruins of what had become a happy household? Or is the end merely one possible example of poetic justice? Or further, is it an inevitable result of vulgar and vicious living? Each one of these three questions invites answers which run along expected lines, but the point that is being made here is that whereas there might be some element of truth about the above lines enquiry, in reality the situation calls for a very different approach which makes the end characteristically unorthodox or unique. In strictly structural terms, a novel can be examined either at the level of plot or that of design. The former represents merely the way a story is developed by being given a beginning, a middle and an end. The latter stands for what may be called a viewpoint with a purpose, mostly implied or symbolic. If a novel has only the plot and no design, it can at best be a structural perfection and a technical marvel. For it to be a great work of art it is necessary that it should have design. *Tortilla Flat* is not a structurally perfect novel and yet it has a certain excellence of design. The key to the understanding of its design lies in Danny's character. By the time the novel nears its end it becomes abundantly clear that Danny is more than a protagonist in the conventional sense of the word. He seems to both permeate and hover the story almost like a presiding deity or a master spirit who does not so much act as shape and control the happenings in the novel. Things do not so much happen to him as they happen around him and because of him. One even gets the impression that *Tortilla Flat* is a microcosm where Danny's larger than life size portrait takes on a virtually transcendental proportion:

It must be remembered, however, that Danny is now a God ... In twenty years it may be plainly remembered that the clouds flamed and spelled DANNY in tremendous letters'; that the moon dripped blood; that the wolf of the world bayed prophetically from the mountains of the Milky Way. (TF 210)

Danny turned into a legend and became immortal in his death and with his immortality he imbued the lives of his friends with is devalued in a 'depraved' world.

John Timmerman (2002) calls Steinbeck a deontological moralist whose work manifests "an acute sense of right and wrong behaviour" (102) and in *Tortilla Flat* he is doing exactly this. And what Clarence Walkout (1998) says in working out careful synthesis between teleology and ethics in literature is significantly applicable to Steinbeck: "Teleology does not require an Aristotelian conception of an ideal or universal *telos* or end or goal. It does not even require that the *telos* be a certain or determinate good. It does imply, however, that living in time entails some sense of purposeful movement toward desired goals. (459)

Again Walkout expands his view in a way that also might apply directly to Steinbeck:

Though universal truths and values may be important for the study of literature, the primary purpose of literature is not to convey or represent such truths or values but to explore the possibilities and consequences of specific human actions and thoughts in a narrative situation. Whatever we may mean by universal truths and values in literature, they are qualities that serve the end of literature and are not themselves the end. The end is the narration of actions that have ethical significance.... Actions that are narrated in literature are often taken as illustrations of universal truths and values rather than as what are-the uncertain and often stumbling efforts of characters to find a way to act in a confusing world. (461)

## CONCLUSION

The fictional world of Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat*, as some readers may think, is not bereft of genuineness and closeness to the direct consequences of the surrounding conditions of the 1930s in America. Thus the fictional world of the characters applies to the real world of the time. Originally, Steinbeck deals with the predicament of the twentieth-century man, who, in particular, influenced by the Depression years, comes to be considered as an anti-hero than a hero. The main character of *Tortilla Flat*, together with the other characters, are leading complex lives, full of villainy and goodness, simplicities and complexities.

Steinbeck was assuredly under the direct and indirect influence of important events of the twentieth century as they shaped the society in which he lived. The world of the characters is that of the Great Depression, when the hopes of the common people were at their lowest point. However, the world that Steinbeck draws in the novel allows his character to enjoy their lives the fullest despite the fact that they are living on scraps and moral bankruptcy. The depraved of *Tortilla Flat* are deprived of possessions, yet they are simple

and lead happy lives: "Happiness is better than riches", said Pilon. "if we try to make Danny happy, it will be a better thing than to give him money." (TF 54). The depravity that combines the characters of the novel, as Steinbeck suggests, has endowed them with a sense of unity. This has also generated a sense of rare beauty in spite of their depravity and deprivation. In fact, the core of this sense of monumental beauty that permeates the novel originates in Steinbeck's attitude towards his personae: "It did not occur to me that {Paisanos} were curious or quaint, dispossessed or under doggish. They are people whom I know and like, people who merge successfully with their habitat. good people of laughter and kindness, of honest lusts and direct eyes. If I have done them harm by telling a few of their stories I am sorry. It will never happen again." (Steinbeck, "Foreward": 1935). It is hard for readers not to see the delicate combination of John Steinbeck, the man, and John Steinbeck, the artist, in *Tortilla Flat*. It is quite evident that the deprived and depraved of *Tortilla Flat* occupied Steinbeck through the most of his writing career.

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