

A STUDY OF THE NATURE OF ANIMAL SYMBOLISM
in
THE WRITINGS OF JOHN STEINBECK

AN ABSTRACT OF
A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE

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June 1964

A Study of the Nature of Animal Symbolism in the Writings of John Steinbeck, the subject of this thesis investigation, concerns, in an attempted analysis of the inherent characteristics and constitution of this symbolism, an evaluation of the consistency of the animalistic terminology and its implication, as well as a regard, too, for its present pertinence and possible eventual worth, both to Mr. Steinbeck and to his writings,--and, of course, to the reader.

As with all writers, and certainly with Mr. Steinbeck, the nature of any special art or writing tendency would be essentially a part of the man and his background. The many inferences throughout his works to animal life, the animal terms used in conversation and description, the implication of the human and animal instinct, impulse, and situation-comparisons are a part of the makeup of the man and his beliefs derived through living, through association. The author's language, therefore, is as his picture of living dictates, sometimes dramatic, sometimes prosaic and lyrical--with much of the rugged, biological terminology conveying clear, definite, earthy pictures to the reader.

As with all workmen of thought in the realm of plan and design, Steinbeck and his writing have grown and changed in the process of each project's completion through a writer's usual wondering and learning with the character-situations. He has moved from a time of serious youthful idealism to a maturity of doubts and inquiries. Basic to these must have been his vast amount of reading as a youth,

coupled with a prepossession of Malory's Morte d' Arthur, and the King James version of the Bible, as well as his later biological work with Ed Ricketts. The resulting narratives speak with an animal-nature symbolic slant of man's condition.

Thus the nature of this symbolism, earthy and animalistic, is at once both simple and complex--a devious technique and a major strength of his writing. He hoped in this way to portray the truth of our society and the need of the individual; to show the strength and necessity of the group, yet the dignity and potential of man in themes of a universal applicability.

Steinbeck's philosophy is American in its transcendental doctrine that man is both intensely individual and altruistic at the same time. But in this tendency which he proposed symbolically, the allegorical method needed a pattern of incident around which details and other themes could fall. But his "scientist" complex could not be entirely non-teleological if he were to be liberally aware. Consequently there arose quarrels between the "scientific" and the theological.

These "reader-perceived" quarrels in many of his novels and stories reflect the dabbling with ideas of allegory, myth, and mysticism, with the animal versus man's higher potentialities--and completely confuse the reader. Yet a critical appraisal of the language, techniques and implications of the animal symbolism of Steinbeck can lead to a resolution of these sometimes quite contradictory ideas.