

Steinbeck

and the Environment

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES



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With a foreword by
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Steinbeck and the Environment

Interdisciplinary Approaches

With a Foreword by
Elaine Steinbeck

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Steinbeck and the Environment

In Memoriam

Professor Stanley Brodwin,

1930-1995

*The untold want by life and land ne'er granted,
Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find.*

—Walt Whitman

Foreword

Elaine Steinbeck

Since my husband John Steinbeck died in 1968, I have, I am thankful to say, led a very busy life. I have an apartment in New York to manage and a little house near the sea in Sag Harbor, Long Island. I am the matriarch of a large and scattered family, and I have a happy social life with many dear friends.

Most important of all, I am concerned with the work of John Steinbeck. That's the part of my life I like best. I enjoy working with his literary agents, his publishers at home and abroad; I love talking about his books on television and in all kinds of interviews. In fact, for years I kept myself so busy with this aspect of his literary career that I had never been able to attend any of the Steinbeck seminars and festivals held in various parts of the country.

Then, in 1992, there came a special invitation from Susan Beegel, Wes Tiffney of the UMASS Nantucket Field Station, and my friend Susan Shillinglaw of the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University. A three-day meeting was to be held to discuss Steinbeck and the environment—and it would take place on Nantucket, one of John's very favorite spots in the world.

We spent the first summer of our marriage on the island in 1951, in a little house on a bluff high above the Atlantic Ocean, next to the Sankaty Lighthouse. John wrote a great part of *East of Eden* there, and he spent as much time as possible on the sea, in the sea, and studying that particular bit of sea. He became involved with the Marine Biology Station in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, marine biology being the second love of his life, just after writing.

So I accepted with enthusiasm the invitation to go to Nantucket.

It was a delightful affair, attended by many interesting Steinbeckians of all ages, scholars and students. The meetings were long, and the speeches were often intense and absorbing. I had a wonderful time, and I am happy to invite you to share some of the experience of the seminar as expressed in this book.

Acknowledgments

Many people helped implement the conference "Steinbeck and the Environment," which was held on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, in May 1992 and was the original source of the papers presented in this anthology. The conference was cosponsored by the Steinbeck Research Center of San Jose State University, San Jose, California, and the University of Massachusetts Nantucket Field Station. Our thanks to Dean John K. Crane of the College of Humanities and Arts and former library head Ruth Hafter, San Jose State University, for financial support. Craig Kochersberger of SJSU designed the program. Douglas F. Beattie of the UMASS Field Station staff provided essential logistical support.

A number of people helped make the conference a special occasion. Particular thanks are due to Elaine Steinbeck, a real trouper about fog and lost luggage. She generously attended every session of the conference and enriched the experience of all with her delightful contributions to our discussions. Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Thrower kindly hosted a reception for conference participants at their home, "Footlight," the Nantucket cottage where John Steinbeck wrote much of *East of Eden*. John and Elaine Steinbeck's friend, Mrs. Nathaniel Benchley, together with Mr. Livingston D. Watrous, helped us to reconstruct that summer of 1951, while marine biologist Dr. James T. Carlton, director of the Williams College/Mystic Seaport Program in Maritime Studies, connected us with Dr. Joel Hedgepeth and Virginia Scardigli, who knew John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts during their Cannery Row days.

The Nantucket community welcomed visiting scholars. Albert F. Egan, Jr., and the Egan Foundation made available the historic Admiral Coffin School as a meeting place. Mary K. Beman of Mitchell's Book Corner provided publicity and a topical book exhibit.

Philip Read and the staff of the Jared Coffin House hotel extended exemplary hospitality to conference participants. Dr. Joseph P.

Grochowski of the Nantucket Research and Education Foundation opened the doors of the Town of Nantucket Marine Laboratory. Nathaniel and Melissa Philbrick led a walking tour of historic Nantucket. Mary Ellen Mack provided hospitality and essential services at an end-of-conference picnic held on the UMASS Field Station grounds.

Folksinger Geoff Kaufman, director of Music Programs at Connecticut's Mystic Seaport Museum, gave an outstanding concert of environmental ballads and authentic 1930s songs from his days aboard the *Clearwater*. Once Steinbeck scholars begin singing it's hard to stop them, and Geoff gave us memorable music long after the concert had officially ended, and into the small hours of the morning.

Finally, our sincere thanks to all the Steinbeck conference participants who contributed in so many ways to discussion, collegiality, and fellowship both during the academic program and after hours. We feel the result of everyone's contributions was a conference and a collection of papers that John Steinbeck himself would have enjoyed.

Susan F. Beegel
Susan Shillinglaw
Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr.

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Abbreviations

AAA = *America and Americans*
BB = *Burning Bright*
COG = *Cup of Gold*
CR = *Cannery Row*
EOE = *East of Eden*
IDB = *In Dubious Battle*
JN = *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*
LSC = *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*
LV = *The Long Valley*
OMM = *Of Mice and Men*
PH = *The Pastures of Heaven*
SLL = *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*
SOC = *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*
SQ = *Steinbeck Quarterly*
ST = *Sweet Thursday*
TAKA = *The Acts of King Arthur*
TF = *Tortilla Flat*
TGOW = *The Grapes of Wrath*
TGU = *To a God Unknown*
THG = *The Harvest Gypsies*
TMID = *The Moon Is Down*
TP = *The Pearl*
TWB = *The Wayward Bus*
TWC = *Travels with Charley in Search of America*
WD = *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath*
WOD = *Winter of Our Discontent*

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Introduction

The problem of how three editors might write an introduction to Steinbeck and the Environment together seemed insurmountable until we decided to adopt the useful evolutionary principle of niche partitioning. Here each of us has contributed his or her own introductory perspective, approaching this volume's title subject from the respective points of view of biologist, Steinbeck specialist, and generalist in American literature. We are hopeful that the reader will find the interdisciplinary approach helpful from the start, using our points of convergence to locate the universals in the scientific and humanistic experience of Steinbeck's writing and our points of departure to gauge what our different disciplines can contribute to one another.

A SCIENTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr.

This volume presents papers by researchers of two basic types. The first group consists of people whose primary interest is in American literature and literary criticism. The second group comprises practicing scientists. This characterization of contributors does not mean that the literary cadre is not interested in science or that the scientists are not interested in literature—quite the opposite, as all the authors represented here have enthusiastically contributed to this interdisciplinary anthology.

My background is essentially scientific, so I will seek to introduce this volume from a generally scientific standpoint. First I will attempt to provide some definitions and common ground for terms and concepts often used in the following essays. Then I will attempt to explain why I feel many of Steinbeck's works appeal strongly to scientists.

Ecology, Environment, Environmentalists, and Environmental Science

Ecology in the sense of man's awareness of interrelationships among organisms themselves and between organisms and their environ-

ment is not new. One does not need formal training to recognize that without herbivores there would be no lions and that palm trees cannot grow at the North Pole. Ecology did not emerge as an intellectual concept and academic discipline, however, until the nineteenth century.

Darwin's 1859 presentation of the evolutionary idea, with his and others' subsequent elaboration of it, is fundamental to the development of ecological thinking. Although there were glimmerings before 1859, it would be very difficult to form concepts of interrelationships among organisms and with the environment without the concept of change and adaptation that is the driving force in developing these relationships. The leading German proponent of Charles Darwin's organic evolution concept, Ernst Haeckel, proposed the term *Oekologie* in 1866 and defined it as the comprehensive science of the relationship of the organism to the environment. Even before this codification, people such as the German Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), and British investigators William MacGillivray (1796–1852) and John G. Baker (1834–1920), had accomplished serious research into plant distribution relative to physical environmental factors (Sheail 1987, 3).

By 1900, a number of people were practicing the new "science" of ecology, although the results were often criticized for sloppiness and lack of standards. In England, Arthur G. Tansley (1871–1955) set out to improve this situation; he was abetted by Frederic E. Clements (1874–1945) in the United States. Tansley established a journal, the *New Phytologist* (literally "plant student"), in 1901 and then assisted in forming the British Ecological Society in 1913. Its carefully refereed journals continue to present the finest of ecological research today. Beginning in 1897, Clements published significant works on American plant ecology, establishing high standards for such work in the United States. The American Ecological Society formed in 1915 and began publishing its journal in 1920 (Sheail 1987, 16–42). By the late 1930s, the emphasis of ecological thought and research was on the relationship between organisms and the physical environment, following the early motto of the American Ecological Society: "All forms of life in relation to environment."

By the time Ed Ricketts studied with Warder C. Allee (1885–1955)