LIFE LIKE OURS:
AN ECOCRITICAL AND ANIMAL STUDIES EXAMINATION OF JOHN STEINBECK'S *CANNERY ROW*

A Thesis
By
BEKAH BALLARD

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APPROVED BY:

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Chairperson, Thesis Committee

_____
Member, Thesis Committee

_____
Member, Thesis Committee

_____
Chairperson, Department of English

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Michael J. Mackenzie, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

Abstract

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Bekah Ballard
B.A., Appalachian State University
M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Zackary D. Vernon Ph.D.

In this project, I explore the extent to which the work of John Steinbeck can be considered as contributing to a body of environmental literature, in particular in his short novel *Cannery Row* (1945). My introduction gives a concise summary of secondary critical work that has been done to explicate the text, and, hinging on this work, I attempt to illuminate the ways that the text lends itself to an ecocritical examination. Following, my initial chapter investigates Steinbeck's source material in writing *Cannery Row*, that is, the setting of Cannery Row itself and his scientific travel narrative, composed five years prior to *Cannery Row*, titled *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* and published in 1951. These influences are critical in understanding how Steinbeck came to view the people and ecology of Cannery Row in his particular way. *The Log*, then, becomes a key aspect of my analysis in the way its view of ecology and scientific understanding supports an ecocritical reading of *Cannery Row.* Secondly, the subsequent chapter attempts to suggest that *Cannery Row* can be considered post-human in its engagement with both nature and technology, which complicates the way we understand Steinbeck's humans. In this attempt, I engage primarily with Donna Haraway's "The Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) and Timothy Morton's *Ecology*

Without Nature (2007). In the third chapter, I consider Steinbeck's representation of animals and the way they come to communicate with the humans in Steinbeck's worlds, both fictional and actual. In the end, I emphasize the absolute importance of this attempt at interspecies communication, something that Steinbeck foregrounds in *The Log* at the same time that he narrates the challenges of communication in *Cannery Row*. Lastly, the coda speaks on behalf of current events we are facing in the crisis of COVID-19 and how these events make visible the presence of non-human interlocutors within an ongoing global climate crisis. My aim in this work, broadly, is to highlight how Steinbeck's fiction and non-fiction becomes deeply important within contemporary discursive spaces, as we try to understand and cope with a changing planet.

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Introduction

What was the shape and size and color and tone of this little expedition? We slipped into a new frame and grew to be a part of it, related in some subtle way to the reefs and beaches, related to the little animals, to the stirring waters and the warm brackish lagoons. This trip had dimension and tone. It was a thing whose boundaries seeped through itself and beyond into some time and space that was more than all the Gulf and more than all our lives. Our fingers turned over the stones and we saw life that was like our life.
John Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez,* 223

The discussion of human nature is never far from the core of John Steinbeck's writing, and yet it is usually connected to a desire for, as evident above, "life that was like our life" (223)—in other words, the realization that mankind may just be yet another species in a tangled web of other species, all occupying the same earth, all asking similar things of themselves. Steinbeck, born in 1902 into the Salinas Valley in California, is as complex and haphazard as the century in which he lived out his one self-imposed commandment that situated himself within this web of species: "to be and survive" (qtd. in Gray 45). Variability seems to be one way to characterize his accomplishments as a writer, which might make the allowance for students who pick up *Of Mice and Men* (1937), read with trepidation, and never again return to his work but continue all their lives to praise F Scott Fitzgerald for his epitomization of the American 20th century. In fact, in one University of Minnesota Pamphlet on American Writers, James Gray suggests that the two authors "divided up the American world of their era" (5) with a sense of shared "responsibility of presenting in fiction all the conflicts that have confused our time and yet confirmed its aspirations" (6). One theme that Gray claims might relate the two authors and symbolically unify the work of Steinbeck is a concern for celebrating the "worth of man" and "the dignity of human life" (7). Even these themes circulate throughout his body of work with a certain amount of fluidity. For instance, in works like *The Pearl* (1947) and *East of Eden* (1952), he emphasizes

the corruptibility of man by his external environment. In others, he praises inherent love and overwhelming obligation within the figure of the "Everyman" in *Burning Bright* (1950). In most he depicts the struggle between the forces of good and evil, complicating both, and gesturing toward his insistent belief in the perfectibility of man. What takes further emphasis, though, is the notion that humans, throughout this struggle, are inextricably bound to their environments. Gray aptly claims that Steinbeck "might be called a moral ecologist, obsessively concerned with man's spiritual struggle to adjust himself to his environment. It is significant that this storyteller, conscious of a mission, undertook to popularize theories about the salvation of man's total environment long before public attention focused on the discipline of ecology" (44). Although many of his texts are indicative of this concern, *Cannery Row*, which was written in 1944 and published in 1945, additionally reflects much of Steinbeck's personal knowledge about an environment and community that he deeply cherished. One can see this aspect even in the front matter of the novel dedicated to his friend and scientist, "Ed Ricketts, who knows why or should."

Partly due to Steinbeck's longing for his past experiences, one of the most frequent criticisms of *Cannery Row* is that it does not have much of a narrative plot and instead attempts to capture the feeling of a place and its people with a heavy dose of personal nostalgia. The novel simply tells of Mack and the boys, an unemployed but resourceful group of friends living in an abandoned fish-meal shack on the Row. They are inspired to throw a party for Doc, a wise and respectable biologist who runs a lab on the Row, in an attempt to fix his melancholy. A great deal of time is spent preparing this party and harassing Lee Chong, the local grocer; however, their plans are rendered fruitless when Doc is late for his own party and finds his lab completely destroyed. After some time of recovery and

despondency on the Row, the boys decide to try again to throw yet another party for Doc, but this time one that he can actually enjoy. Throughout the novel, Mack and the boys become figures of passivity in their setting: “But whereas most men in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their targets, Mack and his friends approached contentment casually, quietly, and absorbed it gently” (9). While they are presented as admirable for their acquiescent way of life, they are dualistic; for the environmental future of Cannery Row, this passivity leads to complicity, which ultimately contributes to the decay of their setting. In turn, Steinbeck’s sense of nostalgia becomes embedded in a mourning for a lost era when nature, industry, and culture purportedly existed in harmony.

Beyond its seemingly simplistic plot structure, the novel is filled with inter-chapters that depart from the narrative plot to depict inhabitants of the Row, both human and non-human, which contribute to its overall wistfulness for the forgotten milieu of Cannery Row. In many cases, the text can be used to serve some ecological, parabolic function as it contains environmental warnings, inasmuch as it carries a sentimental but serious message that human life—paralleled through the novel’s textual structure—is deeply intertwined with and wholly dependent on its earthly surroundings. Steinbeck’s characters are shaped and influenced by their setting, but at the same time they, in turn, influence and shape the environment. As Roy Simmonds noted in 1997, through this text, Steinbeck establishes his place as “ecological prophet” (323). When examining the history of Cannery Row, the industry, and the environment, many critics have uncovered a warning in this text—a revolutionary warning about the dangers of over-development, industrialization, and exploitation. The warning is one given to Steinbeck by historical hindsight, but is nonetheless pertinent. By 1945, the overfishing of juvenile fish for the canning industry had essentially wiped out the sardine and

pilchard populations (the two types of fish used in canning), shutting down dozens of canneries along the coast. It is notable that these fish populations have still not been able to reach their historic levels (Safarik 179-80). Culturally, the devastation was not limited to the environment, as it also breached into Monterey's economics, forcing their local government to adjust the system entirely and begin to rely on more creative ways to reclaim the beauty of the surrounding ecosystems and to reconcile industrial decay, in order to sustain tourism as a new and major source of revenue (Chiang 309-310). This forced change in economy adjusted the simplistic, easy, and passive way of living that Cannery Row held before the collapse, which was ostensibly a result of the same sense of ease with which Mack and the boys approach contentment. As a result, Steinbeck's impetus for writing the novel is, if only in part, steeped in sentimentality. However, years of criticism following its publication has uncovered more at the heart of a novel that, according to F. O. Matthiessen in a 1944 *New York Times* book review, failed to respond "deeply to the forces and movements of its time" (18).

Following the initial, unenthused popular responses to its publication, the history of criticism on *Cannery Row* is fairly brief and somewhat underdeveloped. Analytical criticism on the novel began with a statement by Malcolm Cowley that compares its community to a "poisoned cream-puff"; quite a few authors writing about *Cannery Row* feel compelled to begin their essays by mentioning Cowley's response, a remark that Steinbeck himself responded to, hinting at the hidden complications within his own novel: "If Cowley had read it yet again, said Steinbeck, he would have found how *very* poisoned it was" (qtd. in Benson "A Reconsideration" 12). Many earlier articles published in the 1960s and 1970s begin with their own interpretation of what this means. For example, Stanley Alexander in 1968

understands “poisoned cream-puff” as a poorly covered attack on modern American values “concealed in...an insubstantial confection” (281), but he equates that confection with the same literary tradition of pastoral literature and suggests that the “controlling metaphor” (287) of the tide pool is the driving force of the structure of the novel. Alexander does not explicitly explain this concept, but uses the setting of the tide pool as a comparison of setting within other pastoral literature. He is not alone in claiming the tide pool as a constitutive metaphor in the text, however; later critics will also read Steinbeck’s preface, which compares the tide pool phenomenon with his method in writing the rest of the story: “to open the page and let the stories crawl in by themselves” (3), as hinting toward the intended structure of the novel.

Throughout the 1970s, criticism expanded, dealing largely with two issues: nostalgia and ecology, the former at the surface and the latter underneath. Critics like Robert M. Benton responded to Steinbeck’s hints at something more structurally difficult in the heart of the novel and connected it to Steinbeck’s own personal interest in biology, suggesting again that the structure is driven by “commensal connection with the central metaphor of the tide pool” (134). In 1977, Jackson J. Benson published two critical essays, the first commenting on the lack of scholarship dealing with *Cannery Row* and Steinbeck’s own claims that there was more complexity at the heart of the novel than critics were able to decipher. He does not forget, however, that the novel was indeed driven by a sense of “nostalgia” (11), which added to this cluster of confusion. Benson seems to take this as a challenge to decipher these complexities, particularly within the structure of the novel. He parses it out into three parts—first, he addresses the novel as a social satire or parody, second as an ecological parable, and third as evidence of the redemptive possibilities of art. Benson begins with the claim that the

confusion of the novel "lies not so much in the problem of finding some hidden literary system as in the problem of trying to understand the novel after one realizes that there is neither much literary stuffing to uncover nor any really substantial literary skeleton to compare and classify" (14). Benson's attempt to address this problem relies heavily on comparing Steinbeck thematically to other authors like Mark Twain in order to identify *Cannery Row* as a social satire and a mock-pastoral that draws attention to humanity's changing relationship with nature. Indeed, the parallels between the two authors are striking, but in this comparison, Benson seems to oversimplify Steinbeck's goals as a writer by defining Steinbeck's text by what Twain accomplishes through his. However, he does something that not many critics have done before—he identifies that the novel is much more complex than previously thought. Benson's contribution to the dialogue is crucial in noting the changing perceptions of this novel from overly simplistic to increasingly complicated.

Then, in an essay ""Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist," Benson recognized Steinbeck's first several novels as pieces of romanticism, as they yearn for and romanticize the American west, and he claims that Steinbeck sustains aspects of that sense of romanticism through maintaining "poetic-religious-mythic schemes of thought and feeling" (252) throughout his career. More specifically, Benson acknowledges *Cannery Row* as representative of a turn toward a realist, scientific perspective that echoes the writings of traditional Naturalists (i.e. Melville, London) but identifies a physical order of things with "certain moral and social imperatives" (252) that sets Steinbeck apart from other Naturalists. He also attempts to parse out the duality of Steinbeck's experience working alongside professional scientists, who deemed him "a very good amateur biologist" (qtd. in Benson 248), and his attitude as a writer of romantic prose fiction in order to identify the complexity within his narrative. These

essays by Benson and Benton are indicative of the emerging trend that would dominate the novel's criticism in the coming years—the consideration of Steinbeck's personal interest in biology and concern with identifying ecological connections among interrelated parts of communities and places. At this early juncture, however, Steinbeck's claims to 'ecology' are still surrounded by a sort of definitional ambiguity, which only slightly gestures toward an ecological standpoint as it exists on a literary plane and does not necessarily intersect with cultural or cultural-historical contexts that deal with places, people and environments. They separate the real from the literary portrayal of the real, in other words, without dissecting Steinbeck's implications within actual cultures and communities.

Criticism in the 1990s hinged on this ambiguity and attempted to then define it interdisciplinarily when the University of Alabama Press published a book with multiple editors titled *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (1997). Chapters that deal with *Cannery Row* look at it in conjunction with other texts, like *Sweet Thursday* (1954) or *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), a scientific memoir written with Ed Ricketts, and use it mostly to formulate claims regarding Steinbeck's environmental ethics as they become prophetic of future political ecology; however, an introductory chapter distinguishes between the connotations of "environmentalist" and "ecologist" as these terms have changed since the time of Steinbeck and Ricketts. While Ricketts and Steinbeck were not doing the same work as contemporary environmental scientists, the introduction specifies that they "were advanced early ecologists, not only evaluating organisms in relation to the physical environment, but also including living populations, including man, in relation to one another" (Tiffney 4). As a result, chapters like "Steinbeck's Environmental Ethic: Humanity in Harmony with the Land" by John Timmerman and "A World to Be Cherished: Steinbeck

as Conservationist and Ecological Prophet" by Roy Simmonds tend to take *Cannery Row* as a warning against unsustainable practices, like overfishing and industrialization, from an environmental conservationist in cahoots with one of the first notable marine biologists, Ricketts.

Also in 1997, critics slowly became concerned with class and social construction in *Cannery Row*. First, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin published an article titled "Social Satire in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row,*" that examines Steinbeck's two novels, which have been frequently grouped together in criticism, as satirical social commentary on class and its supposed congruence with indications of morality. She argues that this relies on an inversion of the logic that traditionally assigns a higher morality to respected people and assumes the opposite of disreputable people. This is evident in the individuals of Cannery Row, as they are not over-simplified or classified as highly moral, but, instead, distinguished by their ability to discover happiness within their present conditions. She contrasts Doc, who is distinguished by moral superiority but surrounded by melancholy, with Mack and the Boys who are not traditionally moral characters but content in their situation. While it seems like a departure from the ecological thought, Tavernier-Courbin's work is representative of the moral and ethical dilemmas that are inherent in Steinbeck's texts, aspects of which many early critics could not make total sense. However, the article is tangentially related to previous criticism in its attempt to untangle the morality of social structure in Steinbeck's communities—a morality that is inevitably bound to issues of environmental relatedness. The second work is a chapter by John Walton, "Cannery Row: Class, Community, and the Social Construction of History," and is concerned with the two separate stories of social history on Cannery Row, as he seeks to delineate the differences between the historical culture of the

actual place and the literary representation in Steinbeck's novel, attempting to undo the suppression of class within popular memory that neglects representations of the working class in literature and history. Walton's chapter is incredibly useful for parsing through the social and historical aspects of Cannery Row's history, and becomes particularly important in my first chapter. These critics—Walton and Tavernier-Courbin—primarily work to sift through the social structure of Steinbeck's communities, at the same time that they inherently call attention to the complexity of place and its connectedness with humans, both on a textual and physical plane.

After the dawn of a new century, criticism on *Cannery Row* became increasingly focused. Another book published by the University of Alabama Press in 2002, titled *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck,* features chapters that further attempt an interdisciplinary approach devoted in focus to *Cannery Row*. "The Global Appeal of Steinbeck's Science: The Animal-Human Connections" by James C. Kelley and "The Place We Have Arrived: On Writing/Reading Toward *Cannery Row*" by Robert DeMott are notable examples. DeMott's chapter is focused on terms from quantum physics in an effort to understand how readers should approach the novel. Although the novel has been contended to contain themes and tropes that could yield an interdisciplinary strategy, DeMott is among the first to devote a study solely to *Cannery Row*. He unpacks the implications of Steinbeck's aesthetic vocabulary through the use of the words "participation" and "the new," two terms used frequently in quantum physics. DeMott defines participation as an approach to the reader-response dynamic, which creates a space for audience involvement in Steinbeck's fictional universe. "The new" is representative of developments in quantum physics that caused perceptions of the universe to evolve. Ultimately, as DeMott claims, the two ideas

converge, as the premises of quantum physics break down the barrier between observer and observed and make the world into a "participatory universe" (255). The understanding of physics is less important that DeMott's overarching claim that Steinbeck can be considered as more than the social chronicler and popular icon that he is figured to be, whether that be "quantum mechanic," "conceptual thinker," or "ecologist" (313). DeMott's essay contends that Steinbeck's novel draws heavily from a "historical moment of radical change" (311), and becomes evidence, essentially, of Steinbeck's ability to cross boundaries. DeMott writes, "Steinbeck was one of the few major novelists of his era to participate in the discourse of the new sciences, to assimilate their spirit, and to employ congruent philosophical attitudes, beliefs, procedures from allied areas" (312). DeMott's development of quantum mechanical theory in *Cannery Row* supports a view of that novel that "allowed Steinbeck to exceed imposed limits, to transgress and reconfigure boundaries, to bring the margins toward the center" (312).

For a different interdisciplinary approach, Kelley's study looks at *Cannery Row* alongside *Sea of Cortez* to formulate a defense of Steinbeck's association of people and animals. Kelley cites critics who have problems with the way *Cannery Row* condescends "low-life" human beings by comparing them to animals or giving them animal characteristics, in individuals like Mack, or even disabled characters like Hazel. Kelley uses *Sea of Cortez,* along with some passages from *Cannery Row*, to point out the novelist's deep love for the animal world. Ultimately, he concludes that these critics are misunderstanding Steinbeck's devotion to biology and the natural world, which sometimes even assumes that humans are not "as good" as animals (Kelley 256).

Following this work, critics in the early 2000s became concerned with re-evaluating the actual history of Monterey and Cannery Row and correcting some misconceptions about the setting that arose from Steinbeck's depiction. The most notable are Connie Y. Chiang's article from 2004 in *Western Historical Quarterly* titled "Novel Tourism: Nature, Industry, and Literature on Monterey's Cannery Row," and Jeffrey C. Sanders's chapter in the 2011 book *City Dreams, Country Schemes: Community and Identity in the American West* titled "Reclaiming Cannery Row's Industrial History." Sanders's work aims to reestablish the holistic picture of the neighborhood of Cannery Row by focusing on the individuals that the novel leaves out—those who labored extensively in the fishing and canning industries during the 1930s and 1940s. Chiang's article, while similar in intent, centers around the time period after the industrial collapse when the area began to rely more heavily on tourism as its main source of revenue. The article attempts to assess the relation between nature, industry, and tourism on Cannery Row, as city officials were forced to imagine creative ways to reclaim the beauty of the surrounding nature and to reconcile industrial decay. According to Chiang, the nostalgia encircling Steinbeck's novelistic setting of Cannery Row and Monterey was crucial in building a new version of Monterey that blended older forms of western promotion to fuse industrial and post-industrial scenery. Chiang draws attention to the conflicting forces of nature and industry that drive Steinbeck's novel, as well as the situating of the real Cannery Row between environment and economy. The implications of Chiang and Sanders come in contact with dialogues that deal with the complicated boundaries between nature and industry, especially as they are tied up in economic development.

Later, these issues took on more prevalence and even became further convoluted by questions of the religious aspects in the novel. In 2015, Micah Conkling's article "'Half

Christ and Half Satyr': Seeing the Postsecular in *Cannery Row*," explored the conflation of spiritual and ecological premises within the novel, something he claimed had been largely ignored. Conkling explains the ways in which Mack and the Boys experience a conversion from the "secular or stagnant" to a unique expression of spirituality and, in turn, construct a new, more progressive political system. Steinbeck's own beliefs come out in the novel—as the characters develop a deeper sense of their place in the world and grow in their relationships with each other, the land, and their home in Monterey, the spiritual and the ecological become theoretically intertwined. What is arguable, however, is that Chiang, Sanders, and Conkling are all participating in a discourse that involves changing assumptions of human nature—in essence, what is spiritual, mechanical, industrial, and natural all becomes blurred in one complicated textual web.

Also in 2015, Bill Lancaster published an article titled "The Inverted Economy of Steinbeck's Cannery Row Ecology" that noted Steinbeck's interest in the effects of economics within economically depressed settings like that of *Cannery Row*, where money is scarce and the populace is forced to find creative means of exchange. Ultimately, the novel depicts how individuals function as a part of a whole and, consequently, become dependent on one another as opposed to anything outside of Cannery Row. Lancaster represents a largely unexplored area of the economic implications that underscore Steinbeck's nostalgia and ecology in *Cannery Row*. What Lancaster and other critics lack is the connection between economy and environment; for in claiming everything to be interconnected, the non-human world must be included, especially in Cannery Row, where social and economic exchange are literally and figuratively bound within nature and animals.

What I mean to point out, most crucially, is that none of these issues are inseparable from each other, and the gaps in criticism on Steinbeck's novel have less to do with breadth of information and more to do with a lack in connectivity. Most notably critics fail to realize that all these issues—the economic, social, and environmental—are couched in what lies behind the novel, which is inherent in the non-human forces of Steinbeck's environment as they serve to redefine what it means to be human and, then, change perceptions of how humans interact with their non-human surroundings. The implications of economic development are wrapped in issues of humanity, which are embroiled in conversations of animal subjectivity and are steeped in questions of morality and ethical responsibility to non-humans, to actual places, and then to humans themselves within those places. As a result, much ecocriticism hinges on the ability to pull apart the threads of these arguments, analyze to what extent humans are implicated in this mess, and sit in a discomfort that this action inevitably causes. Like Jacques Derrida accomplishes in *The Animal that Therefore I am* (2008), which questions the term 'the animal' by nature of its singularity that lumps together and homogenizes a diverse group of living creatures, other ecocritics aim to first question long-accepted, anthropocentric terminology in order to challenge traditional assumptions of nature as a transcendental principle. Timothy Morton's book *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) exposes ecological writing for promoting a narrative of human embeddedness within nature when critics cannot fully define the term that provides the basis for their claims. In answer, he raises the idea of "new organicism," which recognizes the mechanical in the natural and blurs the distinction between what is considered human and nonhuman "natural," although he troubles the term. He discusses ''dark ecology,'' an idea that hinges on the contingency between the wild and the mechanical that

constitutes the human being and asks humans to question what extent we ourselves are implicated amid a pattern of thought that tries to save nature while simultaneously othering it. Morton's claims become particularly salient in considering the extent to which Steinbeck blurs distinctions between nature and humans, implicates humans in the face of ecological catastrophe, and troubles the romantic view of nature that promotes a moral superiority inherent in some untouched and wild images of nature. Instead, Steinbeck's 'nature' tends toward a dirty and dark understanding of the non-human world, which also constitutes the human industrial world. His community gets close to what Patricia Yaeger deems a "dirty ecology" where humans must salvage from the waste-production of the higher classes.

Similarly, in the manifesto titled, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Donna Haraway challenges dominant assumptions about rigid boundaries between what constitutes and what separates humans from animals and humans from machines. She figures the human cyborg to be constitutive of both animal and machine, which rejects essentialism and embraces the monstrous quality of humanity and, in turn, challenges the patriarchy that asserts problematic dualisms. Steinbeck studies has the potential to recognize the constitutive element of humankind at his moment in history; arguably, Steinbeck himself anticipates Haraway's theory wherein harsh distinctions between human, machine, and animal become tentative, something that will be addressed more fully in Chapter Two, which analyzes *Cannery Row* through a post-humanist lens. Informed by both Haraway and Derrida, Cary Wolfe, in the book *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003), grapples with the issue of "speciesism" and the idea of the animal in the context of several literary, cultural, and philosophical debates. He argues that the existence of the animal has the potential to disrupt

basic methodological assumptions that have to do with the repression of questions of nonhuman subjectivity, which he claims underlies most ethical and political discourses. The book gestures toward the idea that animal presences can underscore the fragility of speciesism and the violence implicit within the practices that uphold it.

Another work by Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (2010), touches on the inseparability of environmental thinking and everything else. In defense of ecology, he writes, "Like a virus, the ecological thought infects other systems of thinking and alters them from within, gradually disabling the incompatible ones" (19). In essence, this is what I seek to do: to use this framework in gesturing toward the idea of ecological connectedness in Steinbeck's work and to bridge the gap between existing scholarship in Steinbeck studies and an ecocritical lens, which asks crucial questions about humans and their relationship to the world. I believe that a full consideration of Steinbeck in this light is wholly overdue, particularly as his literary worlds are informed by and mimic the earthly world, which is constantly being exploited and destroyed to catastrophic ends. It is through this project, then, that I seek to develop an understanding of an environment that begs itself to be recognized as living and agentive, fully worth the struggle to ethically approach its health and resources. As I grapple with these questions, and as I am guided by Steinbeck's literary voice, I hope that my work can compel a consequential and crucial field of study, seeking and hoping for both large and small scale change in the way we treat the planet that sustains us, as well as other lives that share it.

This investigation begins by examining Steinbeck's source material, in order to construct a substructure for a theoretical interpretation of *Cannery Row*. In Chapter One, the text that becomes most crucial for understanding the theoretical and social framework that

underpins *Cannery Row* is *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, which was published in 1951, but based on an expedition and earlier version of the book that Steinbeck composed with Ed Ricketts in 1940. It catalogues a six-week (March 11-April 20) expedition into the Gulf of California (also known as the Sea of Cortez), where Steinbeck, Ricketts, and their crew stop at various sites along the gulf to collect and study marine specimens. Along with details about the collection of specimens, *The Log* chronicles the development of Steinbeck's philosophy that is largely a result of his friendship with Ricketts. *The Log* is the narrative portion of the earlier work that was first titled *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research,* which combined the journals kept by Ricketts and other crew members with Ricketts' exhaustive catalogue of the species collected. After Ricketts unexpectedly and tragically died in a car accident in 1948, Steinbeck discarded the species catalogue from the earlier work and republished it, preceded by a eulogy he composed in remembrance of his friend. Both in its scientific representations and philosophical conjecturing, *The Log* becomes crucial for understanding the Steinbeck who wrote *Cannery Row*. Secondly, Cannery Row as a historically situated place and community is essential for Steinbeck's representation of it. This chapter will trace the trajectory of that place in order to reconcile the novel with its historical and spatial counterpart. The intent of this chapter is twofold: one, to understand what happened in Monterey's sardine industry and why and, two, to examine Steinbeck's multiple roles in the place and history of Monterey. The latter requires a fleshing out of Steinbeck as a figure that crosses disciplinary boundaries, something that *The Log* is able to foreground. A theoretical view of *Cannery Row* is not possible without establishing first the cultural histories and life experiences that substantiated Steinbeck's particular understanding of the people and ecology of the actual Cannery Row.

In Chapter Two, I approach questions dealing with human nature, what constitutes a human in Steinbeck's textual world, and how he may or may not deconstruct traditional binaries of human and non-human. Hinging on Morton's idea of "new organicism," Chapter Two will analyze the extent to which Steinbeck raises an idea of nature that can be considered not as something wild, untouched and pre-industrial, but as a key into the constitutive quality of humans within an environment that has been irrevocably convoluted by the equal forces of nature and industry. Instead of an endorsement of regressive imagination that figures nature as something pure and sacred, Steinbeck inverts traditional moral virtues before ascribing them to a personified vision of nature and thus challenges the idea that the land holds some moralistic key that exists at odds with an industrialized society. Along with this, I will suggest that Steinbeck veers toward a textual world that mimics the natural world and ultimately blurs distinctions between humans and non-humans, nature and industry, and questions traditional notions of morality that tend to be assigned to these dichotomized categories. Moreover, I hope to raise consideration of a post-human argument that investigates the technocultural constraints that simultaneously construct and subvert the stability of categorical delineations between humans and non-humans.

This analysis will open the space for discussions of nature that depart from a romantic ideal, which puts the natural at odds with the mechanical and asks humans to neglect industrialism in order to praise an unrealistic view of nature. Instead, I argue that Morton, Haraway, and Steinbeck acknowledge the human presence in the world, as an altering force in environmental conditions, and then recognize the entanglement of humans in the face of ecological catastrophe. Steinbeck's humans and their surroundings, both natural and technological, are constitutive elements of a particular environment characterized by sites of

contingency. This chapter will parse through moments in the text that serve to complicate Steinbeck's nostalgia, which critics have so often pointed to as the heart of the novel. I think that, instead of romanticizing this nostalgia, it is important to look at the source of it. Here, Steinbeck's lament for a lost golden era becomes also a mourning for a past relationship with earth, for a sense of rootedness that falters not just with industrial decline, but with the perplexity in what it means to be human and the necessary implications that follow.

If Steinbeck troubles what it means to be human at the same time that he foregrounds the interrelatedness of humans and their environment, then these transgressions of boundaries cannot be singularly applied to humans themselves. Chapter Three will, in turn, further unravel moments between humans and non-humans by shifting focus to Steinbeck's representations of and relationship with animals, in particular how humans struggle to communicate with non-human others, and how that struggle becomes indicative of an inability to control their narratives and environment. Nevertheless, this chapter emphasizes how important that struggle of communication truly is, something that Steinbeck recognizes fully in *The Log*. Engaging with influential critical thinkers like Wolfe and Haraway, I attempt to point out that Steinbeck studies has not completely realized the extent to which Steinbeck's ecological thinking can be considered quite revolutionary, especially as these two texts (*Cannery Row* and *The Log*) work in conjunction with one another. *The Log* builds consciousness of humans as a species among others, while *Cannery Row* narrates the challenges for humans to establish themselves successfully and harmoniously among interrelated and competitive species all attempting to communicate with one another across multi-species lines. It works toward building a necessary future wherein animal presences

can be, at the least, felt and recognized as interlocutors in a continuing environmental discourse.

It is my hope that, through this examination of *Cannery Row*, critics can begin to realize the potential value it has within the humanities-driven conversation about environmentalism. Roy Scranton, in his book *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (2015), argues that the conceptual and existential problems in the light of environmental corruption happening within the Anthropocene are inherent within humanistic inquiry. He thus relates climate change to a story, but not a singular one: "Climate change is too big to be reduced to a single narrative, and the problems it presents us with demand that we transcend visually representative 'picture-thinking' and work instead to create a sense of collective humanity that exists beyond any one place, life, or time" (25). I believe that Steinbeck's novel is pertinent to this claim, insofar as it is situated at a particular place and time, but still contains implications that transcend those particulars. On a broader scale, the story of Cannery Row is the story of how the fictional reflects the real and *vice versa.* Similar to Scranton's intention, The Dark Mountain Project also underscores the legitimacy of storytelling within environmental considerations. This co-authored manifesto first examines the extent to which our human way of life is crumbling, as cultural reality steadily becomes unraveled socially, economically, and ecologically. Like Scranton, the manifesto contains a rejection of typical models of faith that reduce the crisis to a set of "problems" in need of technological or political "solutions." Instead, they argue that the root of these problems is in the stories and myths that society has projected, which have become the foundation of civilization: most notably, the myths of progress, anthropocentrism, and dichotomies between humans and nature. Thus, they depart from these

traditional myths and seek to replace them with narratives that serve not simply the function of entertainment, but to constitute and affirm reality. Both of these projects, at their core, aim to reject the model of civilization that we have created and replace it with new stories. I think that Steinbeck studies can become a fulcrum for this alternate worldview, through *Cannery Row*: a story of the death of a civilization, the loss of humanity as we consider it, but also hopeful recovery by way of new myths and considerations. As stated in the "Dark Mountain Manifesto," "We must unhumanise our views a little, and become confident as the rock and ocean that we were made from" (Kingsnorth and Hine). Maybe Steinbeck's writing is anticipatory of this: "It was a thing whose boundaries seeped through itself and beyond into some time and space that was more than all the Gulf and more than all our lives. Our fingers turned over the stones and we saw life that was like our life" (*Sea of Cortez*, 223).

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CHAPTER 1

History of Cannery Row and Ecology of Adventure:

Understanding Steinbeck's Source Material

A couple of years ago, my grandparents took a trip to California. Although, in their own words, they are not big fans of John Steinbeck because he "uses too many explicits," they nevertheless paid a visit to Cannery Row. While there, my grandmother purchased a copy of the novel to read on the plane ride back, and surprisingly found herself enjoying it. I do not know what prompted her to finally, after years of my imploring her to read it, pick up the book, but I do find it significant that she did so while there. Perhaps she felt compelled by the tourism industry, or by a need to feel connected to the community where it was set. Yet it is also significant to note that the Cannery Row where my grandparents walked represents a distinctly different version from the one Steinbeck's novel immortalizes. This chapter is, firstly, concerned with the history of Cannery Row, how it was forced to change and what role Steinbeck played in that redevelopment. This leads me, secondly, to look at the friendship that developed between Ed Ricketts and Steinbeck as a result of Steinbeck's pull toward Cannery Row. This friendship, as we shall see, allowed Steinbeck to develop a scientific and ecological understanding of life that is the crux of his literary success. The crucial text in identifying this development is *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, which narrates an expedition taken by Ricketts and Steinbeck in 1940. More than that, however, *The Log* formulates a solid understanding of Steinbeck's ecology that allowed him to view Cannery Row and its inhabitants in his particular way.

It is unclear what force drove Steinbeck to Monterey, but it is evident that he spent many of his childhood summers in Pacific Grove, very close to Cannery Row (then called

Ocean View Avenue), and felt a strong urge to return in his adulthood. Although he was born and grew up in Salinas, and he met and married Carol Henning in San Jose, he and Henning gave up their job prospects in San Jose to live in Pacific Grove, where he had lived some fond memories of his childhood (Astro x-xi). At that time, in 1930, the bay areas of Pacific Grove and Monterey were booming with the industrial growth of the sardine industry, unlike most of the country, which had by then plunged into the Great Depression (Levy 9).

During the period from the mid-nineteenth century to 1896, at the first attempt to open a cannery, commercial fishing in Monterey bay was made possible by small communities of Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, and Genoese Italians. These groups were market fishers supplying San Francisco packers, which ultimately led to the onset of Monterey's industrial era at the turn of the century, lasting until the early 1950s (Walton 249). The first canneries, established by Frank Booth and his associates, started packing salmon but found it difficult to uphold the financial burden, particularly due to Monterey fishers who would rather sell their catch to their San Francisco patrons as opposed to these local upstarts. Booth operated a successful salmon cannery at Black Diamond (Pittsburg) in the Sacramento River delta, but, discovering an overabundance of sardines in the bay, returned in 1902 to purchase a struggling plant beside Fisherman's Wharf. Booth's success was owed partially to the contributions of two immigrant men: Knut Hovden, a Norwegian fisheries expert and engineer responsible for the machinery and assembly line operations at the cannery, and Pietro Ferrante, a Sicilian fisherman who experienced early success on the Sacramento delta but relocated to Monterey in 1905, helping Booth acquire control of the Monterey fleet by supplanting competitors of Genoese and Asian descent (Walton 249). Through the labor forces of Sicilian fishers and other migrant workers and families,

industrialized production facilities, and the overabundance of sardines, Booth's cannery ushered Monterey into the industrial era. The demand for the sardine market steadily increased during World War I, which provided the opportunity for Booth to open a row of eight canneries and reduction plants in New Monterey (Walton 250). In 1916, Hovden separated from Booth's employment and developed a sizable modern plant at the far end of the street that would soon be named Cannery Row.

During the 1920s, the industry experienced a large expansion due to larger boats and nets, as well as increased profits from proportions of the catch that were reduced to fish oil, meal and fertilizer. Early on in this development, California's state biologists in the Fish and Game Division began to warn about the depletion of fish populations that seemed inevitable at the rate of overfishing, but communities and industries in Monterey were reluctant to believe these predictions. Monterey's inhabitants attacked legislative limitations on the profligate reduction process that aimed to set quotas on the volume of canned-to-reduced product, which would have significantly reduced the amount of fish that was allowed to be reduced into fertilizer instead of being canned for consumption, an action that would have slowed production and fishing rates significantly. This legislation was met with resistance both in the courts, where it was deemed unconstitutional, and in public discourse that argued for the necessity of jobs during a period of economic depression (Walton 250). After the boom years of the 1930s, the industry experienced rapid decline because of overfishing, fluctuations in ocean tides and temperatures, and long-term species life cycles, all of which sizably reduced the annual sardine catch and led to plant closings and property sales to real estate and salvage firms (Walton 250). By 1945, the same year that Steinbeck published

Cannery Row, sardine populations were becoming depleted and, within five years, Cannery Row would begin deciding what to do with the empty waterfront properties.

The rest of the history of Cannery Row is one of attempted recovery, where history of industry and textual representation create the place it is now. It is the place that then becomes most critical because it is a site of convergence—of science and art, of narrative and people, and of an author and his physical influence and insertion into historical place. This history allows Cannery Row to become caught in between a celebration of industrial success and a tribute to an author who acknowledged the faults in and dangers of that success. For understanding Steinbeck's active contribution to place, and bridging the gap between history and representation, I turn now to an article by Connie Y. Chiang, titled "Novel Tourism: Nature, Industry, and Literature on Monterey's Cannery Row," which examines the evolution of tourism on Cannery Row from the period of 1950-1970, after the release of the novel. Rather than focus her history on a later time, during the 1980s after the opening of the Monterey Bay Aquarium in a former cannery, which most scholarship chooses to explore, Chiang writes about the period after the war and after the collapse of the sardine canning industry, when the area was in the throes of collaborative rehabilitation. The article attempts to assess the relation between nature, industry, and tourism on Cannery Row, as city officials were forced to imagine creative ways to reclaim the beauty of the surrounding nature and to reconcile industrial decay. According to Chiang, the nostalgia encircling Steinbeck's novelistic setting of Cannery Row and Monterey was crucial in building a new version of Monterey that blended older forms of western promotion to fuse industrial and post-industrial scenery. The end result of this rehabilitation comes to be rather ironic, since Steinbeck's Monterey gets fused with the "post-industrial collage" (311) to invoke a sense of nostalgia

for a lost era of industrial success, even as that success hinged on the over exploitation of natural resources that led to its decay. Chiang's history points out that, in some sense, post-decline Monterey begins to revel in what it condemns by allowing the deteriorating built environment to become an enhancement to Monterey's nature, although it was the thing that allowed nature to become over-exploited. Chiang writes, "While postwar Montereyans... no longer had a lucrative natural resource-based economy to publicize, they enveloped the sardine industry's history and physical remains in nostalgic depictions of a Steinbeck-inspired past and a celebratory narrative of industrial accomplishments. The result was a tourism program that neglected the causes and consequences of the sardine collapse" (311). For a further layer of irony, Chiang insists that Montereyans viewed the canneries as, one, a crucial aspect in the formation of identity in Monterey and, two, a way out of the reliance on tourism that would reduce Monterey to a resort destination. The canneries, even after they were shut down, continue to establish an identity of place even without Steinbeck's influence, although the relationship between Steinbeck's novel and the inhabitants of Monterey should not be discounted.

Although popular and critical reception of the novel did not favor Steinbeck's depiction of Monterey, local sales of *Cannery Row* were not affected by the negative sentiment. In fact, according to Chiang, Monterey bookstore owners reported their highest level of profits in quite some time. Additionally, several of the city's inhabitants began to consider the negative reviews as "in some way, a slur on the town itself" (qtd. in Chiang 318). In the meantime, Monterey slowly began to attract a steady amount of visitors who were fans of the novel and came looking for Lee Chong's Grocery, Doc's Western Biological Laboratory, and Dora's Bear Flag Restaurant, so that eventually Steinbeck's "literary

landscape" (318) began to eclipse the historical landscape of Monterey. However, besides Wing Chong's Grocery (the model for Lee Chong), visitors found themselves struck by the desertion of Cannery Row that had taken place after the collapse of the sardine industry and were disappointed with the actual place that Steinbeck had described as bustling with life. As a result of this destruction, even while the place was attracting some visitors, post-industrial Monterey was left figuring out what was in store for their community and economy—a decision for which they would look to Steinbeck himself for advice. In 1957, he published in the *Monterey Peninsula Herald* his four proposals for Cannery Row: first, the "old-old" would consist of rebuilt shacks and Chinese gambling dens of scrap wood and tin; then the "new-old" would reproduce the smell and look of the sardine industry; and the "pseudo-old" would resurrect Monterey's Spanish roots by constructing "adobe" houses of concrete and stainless steel (Chiang 319). However, although Monterey's history held a certain allure for Steinbeck, he ultimately insisted that developers create "something new" out of Cannery Row. He wrote in favor of starting over, commissioning young and creative architects to design buildings that, in his words, "add to the exciting beauty [of the coastline] rather than cancel it out… Then tourists would not come to see a celebration of a history that never happened, an imitation of limitations, but rather a speculation on the future" (qtd. in Chiang 319). Yet the important thing about Chiang's article is that it articulates the ways that Monterey developers did not hold to Steinbeck's plan to create something new, and instead sought to capitalize on Steinbeck's romantic portrayal of the industrial prime. For instance, in 1957, officials renamed Ocean View Avenue to Cannery Row, and, even though it had been informally called Cannery Row for years, the formal rechristening made the place easier for tourists to spot on the map. Steinbeck found this particularly amusing and wrote to his sister

Beth, who had informed him of the name change, “This strikes me as a triumph of city planning logic. Ocean View Avenue was named at a time when you couldn’t see the ocean from it and now they change it to Cannery Row when there are no canneries there” (qtd. in Chiang 320).

The irony of Monterey reaches its peak when it becomes apparent that, despite many dissenting voices that invoked Steinbeck’s calls for “something new,” Monterey fought first and foremost for the preservation of the remnants of industry that, for the most part, was a tribute to Steinbeck’s glorification of its industrial heyday, even as it contained warnings against exploitation and environmental degradation. The city relied on destructed and abandoned industrial fragments to preserve the history of Cannery Row, believing that the decay could augment the aesthetic beauty rather than depreciate it, and slowly the ruins even began to be a part of the rocky coastline. Chiang writes that city plans “sought to naturalize the built environment, making it an inherent feature of the coastline. But even as an ecological perspective began to shape public policy nationwide, the city's plan did not fully address the underlying cause of Cannery Row's much-needed redevelopment: the collapse of the sardine industry. Instead, it romanticized a past ambition to exploit natural resources” (322). For a city that signaled in its history the dangers of a complete misuse of natural resources to then capitalize on that history, forgetting the reasons for collapse and reveling in the framework that caused it, seems to uphold in a similar short-sightedness. Then to integrate a fictional world into a real history I think is a misunderstanding of Steinbeck’s purposes that he articulates in *The Log* and then represents in *Cannery Row*. This must be why he implored city officials to look to the future instead of idealizing the past.

For these and other reasons, however, Steinbeck's intervention in Cannery Row has been looked at by critics as overshadowing the real history of Monterey. John Walton, for example, looks at two separate stories of social history on Cannery Row, seeking to delineate the differences between the historical culture of the actual place and the literary representation in Steinbeck's novel. He claims that Steinbeck's characters, although loveable, exist far outside the world of industrial production and working-class family representation. Through delving into the memory of social class and labor in Monterey—and specifically within the canning industry on Cannery Row—Walton attempts to undo the suppression of class within popular memory. He claims, "Memory is primarily a social rather than individual phenomenon, and history is far from consensual but understood in different ways by circumstantially rooted groups, classes, communities, and nations. In monuments and rituals, groups commemorate their past just as they recreate it under present conditions in ways that may repress or romanticize memory" (248). Walton is concerned with the social construction of history, which he argues cannot fully be explained by any working theory. He uses the history and centrality of social class in Monterey to provide a theoretical account of how collective memory and local history have dealt with class and society. The way Walton traces the actual history of the canning industry in the bay, particularly the gender and ethnic diversity that the industry labor attracted, demonstrates groups of individuals and communities that, as Walton claims, Steinbeck's novel neglects to represent.

In support of this argument, Walton lists labor statistics, details communities of laborers of different nationalities, their tensions with one another, and their efforts to unionize and take collective action against the state of California's attempts to regulate the sardine canning and reduction industry. According to Walton, the 1920s was a period of

working-class struggle on Cannery Row, struggle that would begin on the fishing fleet and then spread back to the canneries in the 1930s. Fishing grounds became sites of sometimes violent political resistance between groups of people couched in class, but also race; Italian fishers often resorted to force and sabotage to maintain control of fishing grounds. What is important about these conflicts, though, is the way state efforts to regulate the industry often superseded the struggles between fishers, boat owners, and cannery workers, which led to progressive legislature like the California Fish Conservation Act of 1919 (Walton 270). This act, although amended later, aimed to limit the amount of sardines that could be reduced for fish meal fertilizer—a product of the canneries that proved to be much more profitable than canned sardines. However, these attempts were clouded by economic logic and political power that understood the lack of appeal in simple canned sardines, and, despite a state sanctioned effort to create a market for sardines, canning companies realized their profit came from fertilizer and fish oil for soap, paint, medicine, salad oil, leather tanning, glycerin, and precision machine oil (Walton 271). Even if the state had been successful in pushing the industry to accept these limitations, they would always find ways around it. For instance, in the 1930s, the invention of "floaters"—offshore, shipboard reduction factories—complicated the dispute, because it allowed factories to remain physically outside the reach of California state law. In 1929—thanks to contentious resistance from canners and civic boosters who argued for "liberalized reduction quotas in order to lift the 'handicap' borne by the shore-based, tax-paying, job-providing canneries" (Walton 271)— the limit on reduction percentages was raised from 25 percent of the catch to 32.5 percent. Walton writes that, "As the several groups that constituted the fishing industry joined forces in support of greater reduction, class conflict gave way to concerted, even prodigious action, but action headed for

ecological ruin" (271). Any efforts toward conservation turned into a disjunctive either/or situation—between the rare promise of jobs in the middle of a nationally depressed economy, or the long-term survival of ocean ecologies. In the short-sighted, progress-oriented, capital-based political climate, the former took precedence.

Additionally, the way people of the industry understood sardine and other fish populations as a resource exposes a key aspect of the political and ideological framework that produced tension between people and between people and environment. Walton quotes the Scofield brothers of the Fish and Game Division, who warned against the destruction of fisheries that seemed inevitable without state-enforced conservation, and who explained that the "fisherman's problem" was contingent on a resource that was considered common property. According to them, "'No one of them owns the resource so as to keep others away from it. As a result, everyone has an incentive to keep fishing so long as there is any money to be made in the effort, whereas no one has an individual incentive to refrain from fishing so as to conserve the stock. Every harvester knows that if he or she leaves a fish in the water someone else will get it and the profit, instead'" (qtd. in Walton 270). In this statement, it seems possible that these industries were aware of their short sightedness and the potential for ecological disruption (disruption at the *least*), but that awareness does not matter so long as they continued to remain complicit in it. What is more, if this does indicate awareness of the limitations, then a clear distinction arises having to do with the motivation for collective action, action that was influenced from the top down—from the industry that knew how to make profits, and arguably, knew that they were dealing in finite resources, or at least had been warned. In short, the arguments against the state, on the surface, were about jobs and class, but that may have only been at the surface. The either/or situation can then be thought

of in light of the fact that these jobs might have been knowingly unsustainable, something that Walton's argument does not consider. Yes, as Walton aims to support, "class happened in Monterey" (273), but class could only continue to happen while resources and environment provided the illusion of stability that allowed class to happen. If the state and the industry foresaw the overwhelming possibility that it was not going to last, then class could not have been the main priority, or at the least, it was an excuse. What I mean is that it is possible for job prospects to overshadow deeper and more corrupt prioritization of industry and the wealth of those in charge, which seems obvious throughout history. For Monterey, the height of job availability came also at a time when the rest of America was struggling to create jobs for ordinary citizens, which put this coastal community at risk for the needs of many to actually serve as a cover for the accumulation of wealth to happen for the few at the very top. This is, of course, speculation, but it foregrounds my hesitancy to celebrate class for the sake of class. It also, in a broader application, should serve as evidence of the fact that this time of success and wealth in Monterey was merely a facade, where wealthy citizens exploit not only their environment, but also the work ethic of diverse people who, as a result, became complicit in this exploitation.

Walton's argument tends toward discrediting Steinbeck's literary imagination by claiming that it eclipses the social and industrial history of diverse groups of people actually living on Cannery Row. He is figuring Steinbeck outside of this history, as a sort of omnipotent hand that shapes popular memory, erasing the experiences of a multiethnic community of men and women. It is true that Steinbeck's Cannery Row and the pre-industrial decline Cannery Row represent disparate versions of history. However, what Walton fails to consider is the way that Steinbeck actually can be situated to become a part of

Cannery Row's history in powerful ways that cross disciplinary boundaries. Of course, it is not wholly productive to ignore the historical and social constructions of memory that reshape configurations of this place, and, indeed, Steinbeck's novel does contribute to that reconstruction. But it also, from the point of privilege granted to many pieces of modernist literature, reconstructs the reality of an actual setting, a place that Steinbeck foresaw the destruction and, intentionally or not, crafted a narrative that extends outside of itself in order to allow the place that it represents to become itself. This first requires a look at both influences that establish a framework for understanding this place, the people (real and fictional) within it, the author that actively shapes it, and the broader theoretical understanding of humans, non-humans, and environment that it gestures toward.

Ed Ricketts, a philosophizing, unorthodox marine biologist and close friend of John Steinbeck, is a figure important to both the history of place and to Steinbeck's conceptual construction as a novelist who drew deeply on scientific knowledge in the development of narrative structure, character and environment to give a holistic picture of life as he understood it. In his 1995 introduction to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Richard Astro writes about the way the friendship between Steinbeck and Ricketts, and the effects it had on Steinbeck's thinking, accounts for much of the novelist's success as an author. He traces this friendship back to a mutual appreciation for marine science and ecological thinking, arrived at independently of one another and then nurtured within a deep and important relationship. In Astro's account, we can identify some forces at play that put the two in a position to grow their ideological framework together, not only strengthening their bond, but reaching into the foundations of their identity as authors and public thinkers. The first notable aspect is the significance of place. For Steinbeck, Pacific Grove was not his home in the traditional sense,

but he felt some important gravitational pull toward it. The Steinbecks were struggling financially after his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), failed to bring in any profit, when he met Ricketts, whose lab was positioned between fish processing plants on Cannery Row (then called Ocean View Avenue) (Astro xi; Chiang 317). Shortly after their meeting, Ricketts, who was making a living during the Great Depression by selling prepared slides to local high schools, hired Carol as his secretary at Pacific Biological Laboratory. This place, similar to Doc's laboratory in the novel, would become a site of gathering, philosophizing, observing, and drinking for some joyful years in Pacific Grove (Chiang 317).

Secondly, there are some notable commonalities in their research, reading, and theorizing that developed in the years before Ricketts and Steinbeck met. For Steinbeck, the inception of his ideas about marine science began in 1923 with his attendance at a summer course in general zoology at the Hopkins Marine Station, and subsequent exposure to the theorizing of William Emerson Ritter, whose concept of the "superorganism" made a lasting impression on the young scholar (Astro xi). Ritter conjectured that "in all parts of nature and in nature itself as one gigantic whole, wholes are so related to their parts that not only does the existence of the whole depend on the orderly cooperation and interdependence of the parts, but the whole exercises a measure of determinative control over its parts" (qtd. in Astro xi). Echoes of Ritter's theories are apparent in Steinbeck's thinking from the beginning of his literary career, but reach their peak in *The Log* and Steinbeck's collaboration with Ricketts. In particular, Ritter contends that "man's supreme glory [is not only] that he can know the world, but he can know himself as knower of the world" (qtd in Astro xii). Ricketts was unfamiliar with the work of Ritter when he moved to California in 1923 after dropping out of

the University of Chicago.[1] However, Ricketts was a scholar devoted to the work of W. C. Allee, from Woods Hole, Massachusetts, who also looked into the relational nature of living organisms, posturing that "the social medium is the condition necessary to the conservation and renewal of life" (qtd in Astro xii), in other words, that organisms cooperate with each other to guarantee their own safety, as an automatic and not a conscious process. Ritter's and Allee's ecological work proved to be complementary to each other, and both extended the reach of their analysis to form hypotheses about humans, a technique that would later be adopted by Steinbeck and Ricketts, culminating in the philosophical conjecturing of *The Log*. Astro writes, "From Ricketts, Steinbeck learned to see life in scientific terms. His own reading of Ritter, and the years of conversations with Ricketts, helped him see life in largely biological terms. Perhaps that is why so many of his most memorable characters are animal-like in thought and action" (xix).

As a marine biologist whose work departed from the conventional work of his contemporaries in that he sought to look at marine communities as a whole, rather than studying individual animals pickled and dissected in stiff laboratories, Ricketts became an expert in intertidal life organized around environment instead of taxonomy. Steinbeck and Ricketts critique traditional forms of scientific method, writing, "The man with his pickled fish has set down one truth and has recorded in his experience many lies. The fish is not that color, that texture, that dead, nor does he smell that way" (*The Log* 2). This view, and subsequently, the publication of Ricketts' book *Between Pacific Tides* (1939), was met with controversy in the scientific community (Levy 8). However, Ricketts is important to popular memory not necessarily for these ideas—although they were crucial to the texts that preserve

[1] Astro is kind in his portrayal of Rickett's academic experiences, quoting him as experiencing an "uneven career as a biology undergraduate" (xii). Other sources are less kind, deeming him a "skirt-chasing college dropout" (Levy 8).

his memory—but for his representation in *Cannery Row* as the character of Doc who, like Ricketts, holds an irreverent appreciation for beer, for women, and for Eastern philosophies (Levy 8). Also like Ricketts, Doc has a deep connection to marine life and Monterey, which proved to be invaluable to Steinbeck's construction not just of this character, but of himself as a novelist.

On March 11th, 1940, Steinbeck and Ricketts embarked on an expedition into the Gulf of California in *The Western Flyer*. It is important to remark that the boat left the coast after Monterey's annual sardine festival, a large party hosted at the end of the fishing season, celebrating the ocean bounty that fostered the town's economy (Levy 9). There are many documented reasons for this journey, and each critical approach to this text chooses to highlight one as the fulcrum for analysis, over many others that have been cited. On one hand, scientists that cite Rickett's work seem to understand this trip as pioneering expedition of collection and observation that presents a surprisingly readable account of organismal populations in the Bay of California, a somewhat groundbreaking text on ecology (Levy; Tiffney et al.). On the other hand, literary critics might view it as a work that reminds us of a travel narrative, but results in a continuing dialectic that provides insight into a theoretical understanding of Steinbeck's fiction (Astro; Tiffney et al.). If anything, the text is convoluted and confused by both conflicting and aligning perspectives of two men whose individual ways of thinking were already always paradoxical. At the very least, it is an account that sets out to affirm and combine the thinking of Ritter and Allee that the two friends and explorers found invaluable. Moreover, the narrative expands on ideas of relational thinking coined by Ritter and Allee by abandoning notions of human exceptionalism within the species web of life. Before setting out on *The Western Flyer*, *The Log* admits the inevitability of alteration

that the journey would have, not on those aboard the boat, but on the environment that the boat would traverse. Steinbeck quotes in the beginning of the narrative:

> Let's see what we see, record what we find, and not fool ourselves with conventional scientific strictures. We could not observe a completely objective Sea of Cortez anyway, for in that lonely and uninhabited Gulf our boat and ourselves would change it the moment we entered. Let us go into the Sea of Cortez, realizing that we become forever a part of it; that our rubber boots slogging through a flat of eel-grass, that the rocks we turn over in a tide pool, make us truly and permanently a factor in the ecology of the region. (*The Log* 2-3)

Not only do they catalogue this voyage as a departure from conventional scientific study, but they relate this reasoning to an early understanding of ecology and environmentalism that resonates with modern environmental thinking—that humans have always had a footprint in the part we play in the ecology of our environments. In simply recognizing the interconnectedness that is the underlying principle of ecology, Steinbeck and Ricketts acknowledge human presences as factors in ecological change. Continuing, they realize this footprint to be even more vast within large-scale industry. Steinbeck writes:

> And if we seem a small factor in a huge pattern, nevertheless it is of relative importance. We take a tiny colony of soft corals from a rock in a little water world. And that isn't terribly important to the tide pool. Fifty miles away the Japanese shrimp boats are dredging with overlapping scoops, bringing up tons of shrimps, rapidly destroying the species so that it may never come back, and with the species destroying the ecological balance of the whole region. That

> isn't very important in the world. And thousands of miles away the great bombs are falling and the stars are not moved thereby. None of it is important or all of it is. (3)

Again, the irony becomes apparent in the afterglow of the sardine celebration that sends the crew off on their journey, for they are doing the very same thing that Steinbeck cites here as being problematic. Even though the final statements might seem either ironic or dismissive, it is evident, especially as the narrative unfolds, that Steinbeck's thinking prepares to confront the altering effects of humans, a conclusion that hinges on the relational nature of life, of ecology as it emerges in *The Log.* The dismissal could be a precursor to Steinbeck's and Rickett's rejection of teleological (causal) thinking that attributes one cause to a thing that has happened. Even this is relational thinking, although more conceptual, insofar as things cannot be separated from one another, and the crew of *The Western Flyer* cannot be separated from the ecology of the region. The trip and crew are ensconced in the web of causality that rejects teleological ways of figuring the world, but they are still part of the whole, a whole in which systems on any scale become implicated in environmental change. Even before the trip, though, Ricketts already was aware of the environmental effects of humans in the oceans, and critiques it in a more direct way. "Now it is warm and sunny; the canneries are going strong," Ricketts wrote in December 1938 in correspondence with a friend, "They will extract every single sardine out of the ocean if legislation doesn't restrain them; already the signs of depletion are serious" (qtd in Levy 9). *The Log* as a text outlines the knowledges that allow for this foresight in Ricketts and Steinbeck, justifying in a sense why they can be considered alongside California state biologists that warned against and attempted to regulate the sardine industry. Although the threat to sardine populations is, at

this time, becoming apparent (yet still ignored by those on the side of industry), Steinbeck and Ricketts' ecological understanding of the interconnectedness in environment allows them to recognize deeply the danger of this threat in ways that perhaps others had not.

The Log develops this ecological understanding, while *Cannery Row* embeds it within a fictional structure. Contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship, which I will delve into later, gives credibility to the idea that the voyage of the *Western Flyer* can be thought of as both the scientific and artistic framework behind the creative endeavor of *Cannery Row*, so that when Astro claims that the latter work becomes "a search for meaning in a world of human error and imperfection," (ix) we can understand it as an extension of a search that ostensibly began in *The Log* and then gets represented fictionally (or not so fictionally) in the novel. Moreover, *Cannery Row*, through its groundedness in place and historical recognition, makes visible the tenable approaches that Steinbeck and Ricketts arrive at in *The Log*. It makes knowing what happened—the ecological destruction kindled by recklessness and economic systems that allow for recklessness—all the more important and wholly connected to knowledge of the framework that allowed for such destruction. *The Log* becomes our key into the converse side of history, where Steinbeck's and Ricketts' voices do not truly become heard until now, once historical hindsight has substantiated what critics and industrial supporters initially dismissed as mystical speculation.

For the time being, however, I must turn to the text as a whole material and conceptual piece of composition, something that is not clear cut, that muddles the notion of authorship, but provides insight into the symbiotic nature of the text that parallels the symbiosis of its authors. *Sea of Cortez* is an expansive volume originally published in December 1941 and titled *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research* under

joint authorship, with copyright in the name of both John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts. The Penguin Classics version of *The Log* notes that Pascal Covici, Steinbeck's editor, proposed that authorship be attributed to Steinbeck, with an additional subtitle, "With a scientific appendix comprising materials for a source-book on the marine animals of the Panamic Faunal Province, By Edward F. Ricketts" (xxvii). Steinbeck's objection to this was based on his conviction that "this book is the product of the work and thinking of both of us and the setting down of the words is of no importance" (xxvii). Then in 1951, Viking published the narrative portion—the sections without the classifications and descriptions of collected species—separately, titled *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* and attributed solely to Steinbeck. The long-accepted assumption about this version of the text, which still prevails, is that Steinbeck wrote this narrative account himself, and the second part—which catalogs and describes the animals collected, and provides an account of the preparation of specimens—was written by Ricketts. Astro's introduction seeks to clarify this assumption, noting that the narrative portion is largely shaped by two journals, neither of which was kept by Steinbeck. The first, which provides the basis for most of the observations and philosophizing, was kept by Ricketts. The second, which apparently was useful for referencing times, dates, and other matters of fact, was kept by the captain and purse seiner, Tony Berry. Throughout the history of publication, Steinbeck and Ricketts maintained that the book was as much a collaborative effort as a singular one, insisting, in one joint memorandum written to Covici in August 1941, "the structure is a collaboration, but mostly shaped by John. The book is the result" (Astro xvi). This book, complex and non-linear as it is, becomes the brainchild of processes of thinking continually set down and re-molded by commensal relations between men who sometimes reveled in their own inconsistencies. As

Steinbeck notes about Ricketts in his appendix to *The Log*, "About Ed Ricketts," "His thinking was as paradoxical as his life. He thought in mystical terms and hated and distrusted mysticism. He was an individualist who studied colonial animals with satisfaction" (228).[2]

At the outset of *The Log*, Steinbeck comments on the relation of art and science, noting that the two are born of the same desire: "The design of a book is the pattern of a reality controlled and shaped by the mind of the writer. This is completely understood about poetry and fiction, but it is too seldom realized about books of fact. And yet the same impulse which drives a man to poetry will send another man into the tide pools and force him to try to report what he finds there" (1). Here is stated one of the key elements of thought that drives Steinbeck to explore, observe, and hypothesize, which is the same urge that incites his fiction. Whatever this reason may be—and he writes in the following sections that it is, quite simply, curiosity—it immediately figures *The Log* as primarily an artistic endeavor. In his essay, "'The Poetry of Scientific Thinking': Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez* and Scientific Travel Narrative," Stanley Brodwin looks critically at the aesthetic connection and broad relationship between the poetry of scientific thinking and the ways they find formal expression in complex literary structures, something that Steinbeck affirms and imbues in his artistic imagination. Brodwin defends the claim that *The Log* should be considered one of literature's great scientific travel narratives, in the ways that it both emulates and transcends the genre, honoring works by poet-naturalists, most notably Charles Darwin. Brodwin begins by analyzing Steinbeck's assertion that a "good hypothesis" can be considered a work of art, noting that, "when it is completed and rounded, the corners smooth and the content cohesive and coherent, it is likely to become a thing in itself, a work of art. It is then like a finished

[2] While it is unclear what Steinbeck means in the phrase "colonial animals," context leads me to believe that he means animals who live in their own colonies.

sonnet or a painting completed" (*The Log* 148). The claim also, according to Brodwin, works conversely to assume that, if a hypothesis can be considered a work of art, then art itself can be an "aesthetic analysis of the 'design' of nature or reality" (144). Brodwin writes, "On their profoundest levels of epistemological organization, both scientist and poet teach us how to 'know' physical or 'spiritual' or 'inner' reality. Their methods, superficially different, are, in essence, one" (144-5).

To illustrate this point, it is essential for Brodwin to characterize the conventions and challenges of the genre and articulate where they are echoed in Steinbeck's own narrative, as well as the places where he departs from them. Darwin's *Voyage of the 'Beagle'* (1839) serves as the most influential example of this, as Steinbeck and Ricketts allude to the work a number of times in "thematically complex ways" (146). However, Darwin was notably inspired by the ideas and methodology of Alexander von Humboldt's *Personal Narrative of Travels* (trans. 1814-1829). The other texts he distinguishes in the genre Captain Cook's three "Voyages of Discovery" (1768-1780) and Edward Forbes's *The Natural History of the European Seas* (1859), which Brodwin cites as being "the pioneering narrative of marine biology" (146). Although, Brodwin maintains, that though Darwin and others do not contain the "transcendental poetry" that Steinbeck and Ricketts attempted in their narrative, they achieve the same poetic element and elevated rhetoric and all hinge the challenge of translating "the prosaic everyday journal account into an aesthetically flowing and compelling narrative that offers the reader the sweep of an 'epic' experience even as it limns an ingenious theory or beautiful illustration of the law of nature, the hypothesis or 'point in question'" (147). More, however, than the sense of epic adventure, the poetry of the genre rests also on the methodology of "scientific thinking" that gives insight into the mind of the

scientist, which asks and seeks to resolve questions of profound mystery. Brodwin aptly makes the comparison that "methodology is here what structure is to fiction" (147). In other words, method is what organizes the way the text is structured and challenges the reader to re-examine perspectives about the functioning of the world; it is where reality meets romanticism, as the narrators dramatize their emotional responses to personal experiences, their techniques of scientific method, and their non-teleological arguments in order to transform the journal into artistic and poetic expression. Methodology, then, also functions as the "underlying aesthetic dynamic" (147) of the genre, while the journal is the mode through which the narrative unfolds. Another important aspect that distinguishes *The Log* from other works of the genre is that it poses the problem or collaborative effort, something that many critical approaches bring to the forefront of analysis. Yet a challenge that Steinbeck's narrative has in common with Cook, Humboldt, and Darwin is that of covering a vast amount of time and geological space while still maintaining the "rhythm" (148) of the journey. Although Steinbeck's and Ricketts' expedition spanned a time of only six weeks, they still faced the struggle that was arguably made even more challenging alongside the issue of collaboration. For instance, Richard Astro gives us some evidence of this challenge, where simple facts and dates do come to be mixed up in the narrative. He writes that "chapter 24 records events that occurred on April 3. Chapter 25 continues the narrative but is dated April 22, and chapter 26 is dated April 5. And remember that the *Western Flyer* returned to port on April 20" (xviii). This is just more evidence indicating the structural difficulties that the genre poses, as well as the ways that Steinbeck and Ricketts came to rely on methodology and ways of thinking as a structural base rather than just linear events, calling attention to another artistic and aesthetic aspect of the text itself.

In the following sections, Brodwin gives a striking example of how disparate events of chronological order get drawn together by thematic elements and revelations of character to create a sense of "epic" voyage in Captain Cook's three voyages of exploration. In this text, scientific motivations are at the surface of the narrative, which are: "the measurement of the transit of Venus across the Sun, the problem of scurvy, the charting of new continents, the description of new cultures, and, in the third voyage, the attempt to discover the Northwest Passage" (148). All of these purposes had a profound impact on the political and scientific cultures of the West during the mid to late eighteenth century, but are underpinned in the narrative by a romanticism alluded to in a few revealing entries. On one occasion, as Cook is limited in movement by ice floes from Antarctica (a continent still undiscovered at that time), he discloses his "ambition not only to go farther than any one had gone before, but as far as it was possible for man to go," a statement which Brodwin names "a revelation that would do justice to the most Promethean characters of romantic literature" (qtd. in 149). Cook's structural method, however, is rigidly linear compared to other works of the genre, and Brodwin recognizes this difference as it stands in contrast Humboldt's voyages, which become crucial inspirations for Darwin. Although this seems like a departure from Steinbeck's narrative, it is important to note the way these narratives lead up to Darwin's and, consequently, Steinbeck's. His also reflects this romantic urge to "go farther," in a meta way, to also harken back to and flesh out the same influences that propel them further.

Humboldt's narrative, then, is pivotal for its establishment of what Brodwin calls a "romantic ethos," wherein "formal data and observation are woven into a pattern revealing 'general laws' about creation that can stir a reader's heart and imagination" (150). His narrative voice finds itself often at the cross section of science and philosophy that eventually

inspired several romantic interpretations of nature that pursue a "unified" and "holistic" (150) perspective of life, even as theorists presented disparate interpretations of what this meant. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, admired his work. More importantly, in 1832, Darwin deemed Humboldt his "sun" that "illuminates everything I behold" (qtd in Brodwin 149). This is salient because, for Steinbeck and Ricketts, it is Darwin whom they idolize and imitate, and whose holism serves as the fulcrum of philosophical and scientific structure underpinning their narrative. Darwin's thinking that hinged on the interrelatedness of life and ecosystems, leads Steinbeck and Ricketts to posit that life is so relational that each species becomes "only commas in a sentence" establishing the "point and base of a metaphoric pyramid," that an "Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge" (*The Log* 178). This feeling of profound proportions creates a "Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein" (178). Finally, in order to locate this perspective within ourselves, we are advised "to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again" (179). By invoking Darwin, here and elsewhere, Steinbeck and Ricketts establish their own narrative as a similar scientific and artistic endeavor as *Voyage of the 'Beagle,'* which illuminates the question of genre and calls attention to the poet-naturalist influences that propel *The Log* beyond simple narrative description.

The bulk of Brodwin's analytical attention importantly turns to the image of a young Darwin, as a naturalist and fervent social observer, whose presence in *The Log* appears in four distinct ways. Brodwin categorizes these as "identification, the problem of time and travel, the question of method, and the aesthetic of the romantic image" (153). The first time Darwin's image appears in the narrative, it is as Steinbeck's description of collecting along the littoral is frustrated by a lack of time or adequate equipment—although this does not

overshadow “the incredible beauty of the tidepools” (29). At this moment, Steinbeck allows his observations, already couched in Darwinian reflections, to lead to an image of Darwin on the *Beagle*. He writes, “In a way, ours is the older method, somewhat like that of Darwin on the *Beagle*. He was called a ‘naturalist.’ He wanted to see everything, rocks and flora and fauna; marine and terrestrial” (29). In response to this picture of Darwin, Brodwin makes a valuable suggestion: “The evocation of the term ‘naturalist’ in a society where it has become virtually old-fashioned at best, is crucial, for it binds through language a conception of the *lover* of nature in contradistinction to the specialized scientist who has lost the central concern of biology: life itself” (154). Steinbeck’s envy of and nostalgic longing for Darwin’s pace, which allows him much more time for observation, gives us an image of Darwin that is unaffected by time; however, Steinbeck assures us that any attempt to imitate this version of Darwin would be “romantic and silly” (30). Here, notions of ‘romantic’ become synonymous with artificiality and irrelevance, in contrast with a sense of “true” romanticism, characterized by acceptance of what “is,” and which “vivifies the soul into transcendental experiences like those of figures as diverse as St. Augustine, Emerson, Bacon, Jung, and Einstein” (Brodwin 154). In figuring Darwin as a naturalist, along with the spiritual value that title connotes, Steinbeck revitalizes the venerable quality of the title, which becomes crucial to his scientific pursuit in a way that still refuses to compromise the need for disciplined, controlled scholarship. Brodwin insists that “the true naturalist responds to the sublime, the mysteries embedded in the structures and purposes of life” (156). In another significant evocation of Darwin, Steinbeck directly addresses this quality of “being a naturalist,” in a moment when the sun is shining down on the beach, making the crew of the *Western Flyer* “feel good,” and Steinbeck remembers Darwin, in a similar moment on the

Beagle saying that, "'All nature seemed sparkling with life,' but actually it was he who was sparkling" (158). Continuing, he stresses Darwin's writing capability, able to "translate his ecstasy over a hundred years to us. And we can feel how he stretched his muscles in the morning air and perhaps took off his hat—we hope a bowler—and tossed it and caught it" (158). Again, Darwin's association with the term 'naturalist' forms a connection between himself and Steinbeck as artists and poets. The emotional range of this passage reaches beyond any particular temporal moment and recreates the affective experience that becomes the literary triumph of both Steinbeck's and Darwin's narratives. The profound achievement of Brodwin's analysis gestures toward *The Log* as a reflection of Steinbeck's own sense of being a poet-naturalist in a time when those two terms have appeared to be incompatible.

This atemporal instinct in Steinbeck, which is reflected in both his fiction and non-fiction, is perhaps the reason why he encouraged post-industrial Cannery Row to look toward the future, instead of idealizing the past successes of industry. In many ways, his narrative accomplished what Cannery Row could not, in the way that it transcended the particulars of its own moment, even while it contained vital information about that moment. As it was, Cannery Row faced the very particular task of pulling apart histories of its place, in order to ground its rehabilitation in those historical moments. Yet it also became representative of two oppositional ideologies—one that reveled in past industrial success and one that signified the danger of that success. *Cannery Row* is complex in the way it is situated at the intersection of time and place to become both a relic of this past and a projection for the future. On just one level, it is about party planning. On another, it represents a place that would so rapidly rise in industrial development, pull together displaced people from all over the world, allow these people to become implicated in environmental exploitation, and then destroy itself almost as

quickly as it rose to its peak. *Cannery Row* is one frozen moment at the onset of that rapid decline, and at once it becomes bigger than its plot and its characters.

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CHAPTER 2

"Mechanical Cancer" and Ecological Catastrophe:

Troubling the 'Natural' in Human and the 'Good' in 'Natural' in *Cannery Row*

In the narrative account of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), John Steinbeck, Ed Ricketts, and an eclectic crew venture aboard a sardine boat called *The Western Flyer*, journeying from Monterey 4,000 miles around the Baja peninsula into the Sea of Cortez. The purpose of this voyage, which occurred five years before the publication of *Cannery Row* (1945), was ostensibly "to observe the distribution of invertebrates, to see and to record their kinds and numbers, how they lived together, what they ate, and how they reproduced" (*The Log* 1). However, that is only partially true, according to Steinbeck, for the real impetus may have just been a personal curiosity "as wide and horizonless as that of Darwin or Agassiz or Linnaeus or Pliny" (1). Whatever the reason, though, the trip leaves us with Steinbeck's and Rickett's narrative, which is interspersed between philosophical, psychological, and sometimes scientific musings, as the worlds of the scientist and the novelist collide. Within the account, Steinbeck approaches some abstractions that warrant consideration, especially as he blurs distinctions between humans, machines and animals, and as these introspective moments become the philosophical framework that underpins *Cannery Row*. For instance, his beginning descriptions of *The Western Flyer* foreground his preoccupation with connections between humans and their industrial tools, insofar as he ruminates on the intimacy between humans and boats. He writes in his defense, "This is not mysticism, but identification; man, building this greatest and most personal of all tools, has in turn received a boat-shaped mind, and the boat, a man-shaped soul" (*The Log* 14). In several instances of *The Log*, Steinbeck realizes how far humans have come to rely on their tools and mechanics,

not just for survival, but for definition. In other words, Steinbeck transgresses boundaries between humans and machines—and later, humans and non-humans (nature, animals)—to bring attention to a faltering sense of human separation and clear binaries. For Donna Haraway, an indication of the blurring of these boundaries comes with an increasing intimacy between humans and their tools, as they are used to mirror the self. She writes, "For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves" (61). For both Steinbeck and Haraway, humans and their devices no longer exist one without the other, and such is only the beginning; for *Cannery Row*, we glimpse this again and with higher stakes.

In this particular inquiry, I hope to hone in on some rather distinct sections of Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, which resonate with these preliminary notions within *The Log* and, additionally, raise questions about ascribing moral virtues to the natural world, something that Steinbeck seemingly does throughout his text. Many ecocritics have continually questioned the ambiguous use of the term nature and Romantic ideas of nature, calling attention to a tendency to leave it under-examined in light of all its problems and connotations. Timothy Morton, in his book *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), challenges assumptions of nature as a transcendental principle. He calls out ecological writing for "insisting that we are embedded in nature" (4) when critics cannot fully define the term that provides the basis for their claims. Morton asserts that, "Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration" (5). Ultimately, I want to gesture toward an idea that, in certain instances, Steinbeck challenges a rigid dichotomy between pre- and post-industrial values, as well as dominant associations of Romantic nature,

as he builds an interdependent relationship between the human characters and the *character* of 'Nature,' one that can be increasingly realized as being equally non-human natural and equally human mechanical. Instead of dichotomizing nature and human characters, placing them at odds or on a moral hierarchy, Steinbeck seems to be crafting a narrative wherein humans and their environment are not separate. Moreover, even humans are not wholly the force of industry or of nature but are so entangled in place, and, conversely, place is entangled in them. Through this close look at Steinbeck's ecology, I hope to raise a few very salient questions: Is Steinbeck guilty of aligning himself with an under-interrogated notion of "nature" as something that is pure and sacred, and thus endorsing an imaginative, regressive form of nature? Or, by inverting the traditional moral virtues and *then* ascribing them to a personified 'Nature,' is he challenging the idea that the land holds some moralistic key that exists at odds with an industrialized society? Lastly, can Steinbeck's 'Nature' be considered not as something wild, untouched, and pre-industrial, but instead as a figure that connects with Timothy Morton's idea of 'new organicism'—one that recognizes the mechanical in the natural and that blurs the distinction between human-nonhuman, possibly even nature-industry? To potentially (perhaps partially) answer these questions, I will touch on some instances where the two texts may at least begin to problematize them.

This first requires an examination of Cannery Row as a setting situated in the text to be an agentive, self-functioning organism, made of many moving human and non-human parts. Steinbeck's initial page begins, "Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream" (1). Here, his story opens not with a person or an action, but with an environment that warrants characterizing and detailing. Several scholars have looked closely at this first sentence in

order to understand the rest of the novel. For instance, Micah Conkling suggests that it contrasts the idyllic city of Monterey—where power rests within the canning industry—with Cannery Row, where it is the inhabitants who hold agency and transform the place into the poem, the stink and the dream (71). However, we might also read it conversely, or at least as a mutually beneficial relationship between an environment and its people. As Robert M. Benton notes, "Cannery Row cannot be known and understood apart from the relationships and interrelationships which exist in it. It is more than people, than real estate, than buildings. It is all of these as they react upon one another, and it is more" (133). Accordingly, within Steinbeck's first line, I am notably struck by the preposition "in." Instead of separating Monterey and California with a comma, Steinbeck stresses that Cannery Row exists *in* Monterey *in* California. The situating of Cannery Row within its larger setting seems to implicitly call attention to its presence within a larger ecological framework. The preposition also implies the action of zooming in to a particular place within another particular place within the setting of the world as a whole. Then, if we consider the next chapter—which introduces the novel's characters—as a continuation of this magnification we might see the characters, in some way, as belonging to their setting. As I shall touch on later, Steinbeck even gives his setting an autonomy and an emotional relationship to his human characters.

Later in the preface, as a continuation of this initial sentence, Steinbeck poses the self-reflective question about the writing of his novel, "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?" (2) Here, Steinbeck is hinting at another quality of Cannery Row in the cruciality that it remains 'alive' through the structural details of the novel attempting to immortalize it. This question also leads him to the metaphor, which, perhaps, alludes to Steinbeck's approach to

textuality, as his novel begins to take on its own sense of agency—insofar as that agency is dependent on its natural setting, which pervades and manipulates all the elements of the text. Steinbeck writes:

> 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)

Jackson J. Benson speculates that this passage should point us to Steinbeck's refusal to rely at all on intricate, formal literary structures in the novel that dictate the form and narrative. Benson suggests, "He is not going to apply literature to life. Instead, he has decided that the focus in *Cannery Row* will be on the complexity, variety and texture of life itself" (23). Benson explains that the metaphor of the worms suggests that Steinbeck's project will be a "non-teleological novel, a fiction as unordered as possible by previous conceptions and structures, dealing not even with hero (the anthropocentric view of life) or with plot (concern with cause and effect), but with life as an ongoing 'is'" (23). For Benson, this passage also emphasizes the fragility of life, which is a concept that Steinbeck will continue to highlight throughout the novel. This fragility is underscored by the organisms of the tide pool that could fall apart easily. Benson writes, "The author goes into one human tidepool and this is what he finds on this particular occasion, to coax, delicately, into his bottle of sea water" (23). To pick apart the phrasing of Benson's statement, I understand this passage to be an indication that Steinbeck as author and as ecologist embraces the passivity of his own role in

his inversion of the author/text relationship. Insofar as "the stories crawl in by themselves," the words become parts of the entirety of the novel, with Steinbeck as author passively contributing to the structural entity that exists apart from him. The human tide pool is fragile, yes, but it has its own mode of being. In the same way, the characters of the novel are, as Robert M. Benton puts it, parts of an ecological whole contributing to a larger, living "organism" (133). Steinbeck's textual world is informed by and even mimics the earthly world, insofar as its functionality is dependent on the complex interrelated pieces that formulate one delicate, but living and agentive, being.

With this in mind, we can unfold *Cannery Row* both as a novel and a place with autonomy, functioning on its own and, like *The Western Flyer*, a sphere that conflates modes of technology and humanity. These two worlds, both the textual and the physical, become wholly complicated as Steinbeck progresses through his narrative, so much so that it becomes hard to sever ties between characters and their setting in order to neatly fit them into boxes representative of the earthly and the industrial, a desire that much environmental criticism can lean too far toward. Arguably, what Steinbeck gives his audience is at times reflective of what Donna Haraway gestures toward in her work "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1984). Although the work has more implications for ecofeminist critiques, Haraway argues for an image of humanity that transcends certain dualisms that have dominated Western tradition and have "been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self" (59). I would argue that lower classes of people, as depicted in *Cannery Row*, fall also under this domination. Moreover, Haraway explains how modern technology upsets these systems of binarisms (such as self/other, mind/body, culture/nature,

male/female, civilized/primitive, right/wrong, etc.) in ways that challenge the relation between human and machine, making it unclear who is the maker and who is made in that relationship. Thus, humans must reckon with the self as we become "cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" (Haraway 60). She defines this construct of a human cyborg as, "a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (7). In her manifesto, humans are hybrids of machine and organism, the basis for the cyborg, which forms both our ontology and our politics. She signals some important boundary breakdowns that indicate the political function of the cyborg, that is, first that the cyborg appears at the transgression of boundaries between the animal and human, and second, that it appears between the "animal-human" (11) and the machine. The cyborg hinges on the idea that machines developed beyond non-autonomous beings in the late twentieth century "have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (11). The humans of Cannery Row—and Steinbeck's philosophical framework that underpins *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*—recognize these connections in the early twentieth century. Steinbeck's text itself seems to occupy a similar space of liminality, between what he imagines (*Cannery Row*) and what he represents (Cannery Row). In those representations, we can see collision and confusion between humans and their imagined settings and the encompassing forces of both nature and industry.

There are resonances of these unclear boundaries in several moments of *Cannery Row*. For instance, one short chapter depicts the life of Mr. and Mrs. Malloy who live in the

abandoned boiler from the Hediondo Cannery, after the cannery decided to remove the tubing to use on other functional equipment. Steinbeck describes the way the earth envelops the machine: “Gradually it became red and soft with rust and gradually the mallow weeds grew up around it and the flaking rust fed the weeds. Flowering myrtle crept up its sides and the wild anise perfumed the air about it” (47). He continues, “Then someone threw out a datura root and the thick fleshy tree grew up and the great white bells hung down over the boiler door and at night the flowers smelled of love and excitement, an incredibly sweet and moving odor” (48). In 1935 Mr. and Mrs. Mallow move in, start to rent out the larger pipes for people to sleep in, and begin to create their domestic space. Brought on by the desires of Mrs. Malloy, the boiler gradually transitions into an apartment: “First it was a rug, then a washtub, then a lamp with a colored silk shade” (48). The image is a curious one, where family life is enmeshed in the industrial, which in turn is entangled in nature. Haraway’s words resonate here: “The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust” (7). Perhaps Steinbeck recognizes the constitutive element of humankind at his moment in history and, in a way, anticipates Haraway’s theory wherein harsh distinctions between human, machine, and animal become tentative. Furthermore, Mrs. Malloy imagines a space in which she can comfortably establish domesticity, pleading with her husband to allow the installation of curtains within their windowless home. Steinbeck writes humorously, “Finally she came into the boiler on her hands and knees one day and she stood up a little breathlessly, ‘Holman’s are having a sale of curtains’” (48). She cannot reckon with an image of life that totally submits to the reality around her, at the same time that she knows her vulnerability to the

machine that literally encases herself and determines her selfhood, so instead she insists on a life where she can adapt to these industrial surroundings and find her sense of self within the aperture of that nature/culture (or nature/industrial) binary. Mr. Malloy resists, until his wife becomes emotional, and the whole dispute is chalked up to a gendered disagreement that appears to uphold the male/female binary, as Mrs. Malloy claims, "Men just don't understand how a woman feels" (Steinbeck 49). However, as Mr. Malloy begins to seek "a kind of glue that you can stick cloth to iron," it becomes apparent the extent to which these characters exist in a state of uncertainty between what they imagine and their material surroundings. The text leaves this problem in suspense, but the moment complicates our understanding of the world of Cannery Row; for the Malloys, it is a place that fractures their identity between binarisms, making it difficult to distinguish what is human, what is machine, and what is natural.

Perhaps most indicative of this conflation of technological and human on an individual level is Gay, one of "the boys" who plays a minor role in the narrative plot, but like everyone in Steinbeck's world, he is marked by distinct characterization that situates him as a particular subject among all the intricate moving parts of the novel. His level of expertise as a mechanic go beyond anyone else's: "For there are men who can look, listen tap, make an adjustment, and a machine works. Indeed there are men near whom a car runs better. Such a man is Gay" (Steinbeck 63). This inherent reverence for machinery in Gay, however, is put in opposition to industrial machinery where, "the machinery is much less important than the fiscal statement. Indeed, if you could can sardines with ledgers, the owners would have been very happy. As it was they used decrepit, struggling old horrors of machines that needed the constant attention of a man like Gay" (63). It at first appears strange that Steinbeck describes

this industry, one that relies on machines for canning, with an ambivalence toward the very mechanisms that keep them in business. However, it seems purposeful, in that Steinbeck knows the extent to which large-scale industry understands both its machines and people as equally disposable, at the same time that they, like for Haraway, make and are made by each other. In the imagery of the previous quote, then, there is a clear separation between stratified fiscal interest, at the top of a hierarchical relationship, and small-scale individual work that sustains the interest of the owners. This small-scale work is accomplished by men like Gay, who maintain an intimate connection with their tools. When this is thought of in tandem with the oncoming catastrophe and subsequent collapse of industry, it becomes hard to know who is most implicated, as I shall further uncover later.

This character of Gay mirrors the actual individual, Tex the engineer, in Steinbeck's *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Tex's connection to Diesel engines is underscored by the physical and emotional faculties that are aroused when he is near one. Steinbeck describes the way Tex is consumed with an obsession for the engines, viewing them as "simple and powerful, blocks of pure logic in shining metal" (*The Log* 17). Modes of humanity are already embodied in these engines, but Steinbeck goes further to belabor the way that the machines are conversely embodied within Tex himself: "When he goes below he is identified with his engine [...] and we truly believe that a burned bearing or a cracked shaft gives him sharp pains in his stomach" (*The Log* 17). The intimacy is reciprocally shared in both Tex's and Gay's relationship with their tools. Moreover, Steinbeck's sense of spirituality, at least as it appears in Gay, is tied closely to humans and their connections with machines. Gay, in his ability to operate wondrously on Lee Chong's truck, is deemed "the little mechanic of God. The St. Francis of all things that turn and twist and explode" (Steinbeck 65). This extends as

well to a broader sense of spirituality, as Steinbeck writes, "And if at some time all the heaps of jalopies, cut down Dusenbergs, Buicks, De Sotos and Plymouths [...] praise God in a great chorus—it will be largely due to Gay" (65). This imagery is set in opposition to a dominating assumption that nature contains some essential spiritual connection. The substantive evidence against a regressive imagination of nature, then even breeches into the social realm, as Steinbeck feels compelled to comment on the influence of the Model T within a society increasingly concerned with mechanical advances. He writes, "Two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars" (67-8). Here, Steinbeck notices the way mechanical tools constitute humanity just as much as nature does. He also foregrounds the fact that this problem is not isolated to any particular time, place, or people, but that generations of Americans have held an overwhelming fascination with technology that has clouded other inherent human interests like sexuality. Then the technological comes to mirror the natural, and a human intimacy with technology makes it impossible to apprehend nature. It becomes difficult to uphold a vision of technology that is separated from culture and one where nature is not somewhere outside of these two realms, but intertwined within it, and as a consequence, unrecognizable on its own.

Beyond this subversion of binaries, Steinbeck continues to collapse traditional associations of morality that are often thought to be tied to these distinctions, particularly those assumptions that ascribe inherent moral worth to what is considered "natural" and emphasize the corruptibility of modern industry. Early in the plot, Steinbeck describes his primary characters and their previous record within Cannery Row explaining that Mack, Hazel, Eddie, Hughie, and Jones lived in the pipes next to Lee Chong's grocery. However,

when the weather was nice, they lived "in the shadow of the black cypress tree at the top of the lot. The limbs folded down and made a canopy under which a man could lie and look out at the flow and vitality of Cannery Row" (9). Undeniably, upon first introduction to Mack and the boys, we understand them to be deeply connected with the natural world that surrounds them. In short, Mack and the boys are vital parts of Cannery Row's ecological system. Then in turn, Steinbeck depicts nature as having a mutually deep respect for Mack and the boys. He writes, "In a world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackalls, 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" (9). Mack and the boys are scorned by most other inhabitants of the Row and mistrusted by Lee, yet they love and are loved by the 'natural,' non-human world. Steinbeck continues the imagery: "Our Father who art in nature…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" (9). In his essay, "Steinbeck's Environmental Ethic: Humanity in Harmony with the Land," John Timmerman articulates Steinbeck's sense of ethics as being concerned with humans' responsibility to the environment, as his characters struggle to find harmony with the land, suggesting that a lapse in human morality results in America's wastefulness, which in turn affects the environment (311). This passage, which explicitly depicts Mack and the boys as virtuous characters, falls somewhat in line with Timmerman's claims. On one hand, by associating Mack and the boys with "no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums" while at the same time claiming their virtue, Steinbeck implies the banality in traditional values of industrial society and, instead, embraces respect for 'nature' as a chief moral virtue. However, Timmerman looks linearly at the ethics of this relationship as they imply the

morals of humans, and he assumes nature to be either amoral or completely good, but totally passive, acted on by humans. But imagining this relationship as it functions conversely, we can think beyond what this means for the ethics of Steinbeck's characters, and parse through what it signifies for nature as Steinbeck chooses to represent its agency. I think Mack and the boys can be seen as explicitly subverting traditional values and, in turn, as a representation of connectedness with the earthly world, potentially challenging a dichotomizing, romantic view of 'nature' as holistically good—as untouched paternalistic 'Nature' being the figure of environmental salvation. Instead, they problematize the very definition not just of what it means to be virtuous, but what it means to coexist with their environment. For the nature that Mack and the boys live within, is not untouched, untamed, and wild—nor is it a simple backdrop of civilization— but it is an active presence that becomes intimately codependent and mutually destructive in the community of Cannery Row. Such a destabilizing perception of morality in correspondence with a disturbed and disjunctive sense of environment, could potentially then challenge what it means to be a human in a non-human world. Mack and the boys become images of 'cyborgs' as well, but cyborgs who further question moralistic claims over the land. Here, I raise consideration of a general post-human argument that questions the stability of categorical delineations between what is "human" and what is "non-human" by inquiring into the technocultural forces that simultaneously create and subvert these categories. These distinctions become especially tenuous at the introduction of the scientific and mechanical as integral presences within the Row.

Placed in opposition to Mack and the boys is Doc, the owner and proprietor of Western Biological Laboratory. Doc is the one inhabitant of Cannery Row to whom the others look for wisdom, sympathy, and intellectual conversation. Although he is a successful

marine biologist, he dwells among the "bums" of Cannery Row. After pages of descriptions of his physical space, we learn that he "dug himself into Cannery Row to an extent not even he suspected" (26). Any attempt to understand the novel must consider Doc as one of the structure's key components. Stanley Alexander, in proposing that the novel should be read as pastoral, contends that Doc is an example of a fictional presence that comes to the Row "from above," a trope that imitates Renaissance pastorals such as Spenser, Sidney and Shakespeare, who arrange meetings between lofty characters and low characters within the pastoral setting. Alexander argues that Doc sets aside his upper class status and becomes integrated into the lower class individuals of Cannery Row—a setting that becomes a natural escape from the pressures of a higher class and the industrial world (283). Indeed, Steinbeck does seem to be borrowing certain tropes from that vein of literature. He describes Doc's face as "half Christ and half satyr" (26), integrating Renaissance influences from mythology and traditional religion. Moreover, Doc's attraction to the land and unhappiness in industrial civilization is what leads him to develop a more intimate, intentional relationship with the surrounding ecosystems—even more so than any of the other characters, as he spends time collecting and studying marine organisms. However, Alexander's argument seems an oversimplification that rigidly categorizes this text as pastoral, especially when taken into consideration within the larger structure of the novel. For one, Doc is not the symbol of untouched 'nature' in a romantic way. While he is depicted as virtuosic and benevolent in a traditional sense—one that seems to be in conflict with the 'virtues' of Mack and the boys—Doc exploits and commodifies his environment: "Western Biological deals in strange and beautiful wares. It sells the lovely animals of the sea, the sponges, tunicates, anemones, the stars and buttlestars… These are all for sale" (25). In a way, he is a human who disrupts his

setting in the name of gaining control or a scientific understanding, and maybe even invasively embedding himself into his earthly surroundings. In this instance, the depiction of his laboratory and the page long list of what is for sale there, Doc seems to be not the heavenly being come down to restore the 'natural' world, but instead a site of convergence between nature and science—a figure that blurs the distinction between culture, the non-human world, and technology. Just like Mack and the boys, Doc's self is contingent on non-human setting around him. However, as conventional values are equated with Doc's sense of self (he is described as gentle, truthful, and wise), the lines blur between traditional values and the typical humans that are supposed to possess them in relation to how they approach the earth under, in, and around them. Ostensibly, the whole ecological system crumbles under the assumption that the gap between nature and mechanics is broad, with undisturbed nature being maximally good. Western Biological suggests a site of contingency—of nature-technology, morality-science, conservation-exploitation—just as Cannery Row suggests a site of interdependence—human to human, human to non-human, nature to industry, maybe even 'good' and 'bad.'

This reading seems to coincide with a consideration of Timothy Morton's notion of 'dark ecology,' an idea that hinges on the contingency between the wild and the mechanical that constitutes the human being. It emphasizes the dark and malignant reality that is underlined by our interest in the human cyborg. It also asks humans to question to what extent we ourselves are implicated amid a pattern of thought that Morton claims starts with the "thinking that we can 'save' something called 'the world' 'over there'" (187). Nature is not 'over there,' but nature is us, even if in an egregious, unsettling, even 'monstrous' way. Morton's theory figures us as cyborgs, but cyborgs that are responsible for our own

construction as such and, consequently, the invasion of technology in environment. Morton writes, “Dark ecology undermines the naturalness of the stories we tell about how we are involved in nature. It preserves the dark, depressive quality of life in the shadow of ecological catastrophe. Instead of whistling in the dark...why not stay with the darkness?” (187) Morton defends this call by using figures that are actually a cross between human and machine (*Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*) to provide images illustrating how humans themselves are “‘tackily’ made of bits and pieces of stuff” (195). For Morton, the task becomes to identify with the monstrous and “to love the other precisely in their artificiality, rather than seeking to prove their naturalness and authenticity” (195). The idea of dark ecology abandons modes that assign inherent moral value to an idea of nature that exists apart from humans. Doc, as antagonist to and in tandem with Mack and the boys, can become suggestive of the fusion of humans with mechanics and humans with nature that crosses boundaries of morality and humanity, a scrambling of dichotomies that confuses the whole system. Sure, Steinbeck’s nostalgia immortalizes a community from some seemingly lost golden era in Monterey in California and stresses respect for and connection to life outside the human. But it also seems to immortalize a similar darkness, which apparently evaluates the implication of humans in its ecological destruction. Or at least it stews in its own uncertainty in this regard.

A form of the monstrous also appears in *The Log*, within Steinbeck’s descriptions of the “Hansen Sea-Cow,” the skiff taken along with them for traveling ashore and back. He writes that, in this intention, they failed to recognize that “industrial civilization has reached its peak of reality and has lunged forward into something that approaches mysticism” (18). Steinbeck theorizes that, in the Sea-Cow factory, “that secret so long sought has accidentally

been found. Life has been created. The machine is at last stirred. A soul and malignant mind have been born. Our Hansen Sea-Cow was not only a living thing, but a mean, irritable, contemptible, vengeful, mischievous, hateful living thing" (19). He concludes this long-winded theory by claiming that "it is more than a species. It is a whole new redefinition of life" (19). Steinbeck ends this frustrated account writing, "We should have destroyed it, but we did not. Arriving at home, we gave it a new coat of aluminum paint, spotted it at points with red enamel, and sold it. And we might have rid the world of this mechanical cancer!" (20) While this is meant to be humorous, it is the "mechanical cancer" that has real implications about human life. Notably, Steinbeck conflates human life with machines and creates both something monstrous in the Sea-Cow, just as much as something intimate and lovely in *The Western Flyer*. This new definition of life functions sometimes alongside and sometimes at odds with the natural forms of life that he depicts so carefully in *The Log,* especially as he claims that by the end, "our observations were a little warped by emotion… [and] even we were infected with [the Sea-Cow's] malignancy and its dishonesty" (20). Here, morality, technology, human emotion, and nature cannot be disconnected. As with Morton's reversal of the sacralization of pure and untouched nature, the sea-cow and other cross contaminated images of life, which recognize the mechanical and algorithmic in the natural, emphasize the tenuous position of the human as an independent form of life. More, however, they recognize the darkness, and sometimes destructiveness, that becomes apparent in such a view.

The destructive, invasive relationship between humans and the environment becomes further muddled as the earth is seen taking its own seemingly vindictive role, particularly at the moment when Doc finds the body of a girl caught between two rocks on the barrier,

swaying with the tide. It is a surreal moment in the novel when Steinbeck's imagery gives us the exact, haunting picture that deeply affects Doc. As a result, this experience causes Doc to be late for the party that Mack and the boys are attempting to throw for him, which plummets Doc even further into his melancholia. Moreover, Morton's theory might give even more insight into this moment. For, within a romantic idea of nature as it is generally taken to be a place apart from people where the environment exists in a pure and untouched form, the image is striking: "A girl's face looked up at him, a pretty, pale girl with dark hair. The eyes were open and clear and the face was firm and the hair washed gently about her head… Just under the water it was and the clear water made it very beautiful" (109). This occurrence is presented as a short and bleak deviation from an otherwise cheerful novel, so the question is, why include it? Why should Steinbeck burn this image in Doc's brain right before the final scene, before his party? Is it to remind readers of something closely similar to Morton's claims of ecology: "that in fact we *are* the world, if only in the negative" (84)? Morton discusses the importance of this negative awareness about the world, which can undo any assumptions about "some positive 'thing' such as 'nature' or the ecofeminist/Lovelockian image of Gaia" (84). Instead of earth as maternal caretaker, Morton's theory and Steinbeck's imagery insist on a view of the environment as dark, depressive, and active, not as "an Other 'over there,' a victim" (188). In this scene, it becomes destructive of innocence, not the nostalgic presence that many insist on, but a disruptive force in an otherwise happy representation of life. In Morton's assertion that "environmental phenomena participate in dialectical interplay insofar as they bring an awareness of environmental negatives" (85), Doc's moment in the text becomes particularly salient. I would argue that the crux of Steinbeck's prophecy rests here, that the risk of mutual environmental destruction is already

becoming apparent, and that not only are we not separate from nature, acting on it, but that we are involved in it and affected by it; it is not innocent and beautiful all the time. Instead, this is an opposing sense of environment where beauty and innocence are the things being destroyed within nature. With the opposition between a beautiful girl and the finalization of life, particularly death of the human within the natural world, the boundaries between moral nature and industrial humanity are intimately, codependently related and reciprocally catastrophic.

The tidal operations drive the plot forward at the same time that they reflect the ecological system of community on the Row. The individuals (Mack and the boys, Lee Chong, Doc), in a reflection of the natural systems, give and take from each other. That is, they function as a system in a similar way to the tide pool that Doc and Hazel collect starfish from, insofar as they simultaneously love and devour each other. The scene with the girl, in some way, becomes reflective of these processes, or at least the underlying darkness within how they unfold in Cannery Row's ecology. Early in the novel, Steinbeck lays out some of these processes of the tide pool when the tide goes out and "the sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals" (30). He describes the "frantic" hermit crabs and the "murderous" octopus, starfish, and nudibranchs, all in a frenzy of survival that becomes visible during the tranquil silences between waves. The scene is portrayed with a sense of contrariety that is captured within the final sentences: "The smells of life and richness, death and digestion, of decay and birth, burden the air. And salt spray blows in from the barrier where the ocean waits for its rising tide strength to permit it back into the Great Tide Pool again" (32). These systems of life, mechanical in their repetition but natural in their ontology, continue but are interrupted by larger systems outside

of themselves—in the tide pool, organisms are taken by Doc and Hazel, and in the community, Mack and the Boys are foiled by economic and social limitations. However, the pattern of destruction, death, peace and repetition has resonances in the way Steinbeck's plot unfolds, which leads Mack and the Boys to repeat an attempt for Doc's party. Yet, this interchange between Doc and the face of death allows for a pause in plot and tone that disrupts and endures to affect the remainder of the novel. It is the presence of the murderous that is inherent to all life, not isolated in the tide pool, but visible in between and within moments of tranquility.

Moving forward, after the first failed attempt at a party, the boys throw another, more successful one in honor of Doc. However, the ending scene is not without a lingering sense of despondence. A poem called "Black Marigolds," translated from Sanskrit by E. Powys Mathers, bridges the last few chapters and brings a curious sense of melancholy to the novel's end. The first section, read aloud during the party, reflects on the loss of a beloved women: "Even now/ I remember that you made answer very softly,/ We being one soul, your hand on my hair,/The burning memory…" (172). After he finishes the poem, the party becomes bleak and everyone leaves. Then in the morning, Doc finishes reciting the poem to himself while he cleans and watches the tide from his window. Now, the poem becomes even more nostalgic, but for the speaker's own relationship with life. He recites, "Even now/ I mind that I loved the cypress and roses, clear,/ The great blue mountains and the small gray hills,/ The sounding of the sea…" (180). Then the novel ends with Doc wiping tears from his eyes and the image of rattlesnakes laying in their cages and staring into space "with their dusty frowning eyes" (181)—an image that affirms one last time the collapsing boundaries between animals, humans, and technology; the rattlesnakes are a part of Doc's laboratory as

much as Doc is. The dust, the mark of human presence, has both physically and symbolically accumulated. For such a lighthearted book about party planning, the ending leaves readers with a dreary and mournful image for lost life and time and an ambivalence toward earthly landscapes. The lament is not just for a nostalgic sense of community that critics so often ascribe to this text, but even more for a relationship with earth, for a sense of rootedness that falters not just with industrial decline, but with the perplexity in what it means to be human and the necessary implications that follow.

Haraway's manifesto, aside from describing the notion of human cyborgs, also aims to point out the ways that humans have contributed to the construction of the cyborg in their own narratives, an association that Steinbeck predates but ostensibly anticipates. Haraway writes:

> In the traditions of "Western" science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This essay is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction. (7)

Converging then with Morton's suggestion that we reckon with the discomfort that such a view necessarily causes, Haraway and Steinbeck both present worlds where humans and their environment cannot be reconciled without an understanding of this new post-human human. In Steinbeck's text, depictions of ecosystems are dispersed between depictions of industry

and cultivated civilization, so much so that the text becomes a quilted image of interrelations so inseparable that its system is revealed to be nothing if not wholly complicated. In simply attempting an inquiry and pointing to some out of the many instances that gesture toward a textual world that reflects the complexity of our earthly world, I hope to call attention to a fraught system of humanity and materiality with no clear solution to the mutual and codependent decay between nature and industry, between humans and their non-human surroundings. As these figures have so interlaced themselves together, just like Steinbeck's ecology, a collapse of all seems undeniably inevitable.

In Steinbeck's log from March 18th during the expedition of *The Western Flyer,* he discusses the strictures of old teleological thinking that he claims have infected human observation, "causal thinking warped by hope" (72). In his mind, hope is a characteristic human trait that changes our thinking, our politics, and our collective behavior. For Steinbeck, the development of hope in our species counterbalances memory by providing a projection for the future; in our evolution it becomes a coping mechanism for thought that allows the species to continue being. Steinbeck writes, "And out of this therapeutic poultice we build our iron teleologies and twist the tide pools and the stars into the pattern" (72). In this view, hope is only a projection, a trick, that is influenced by thinking that humans are headed toward perfection, that there is a future that will always be better than the past. Furthermore, our understanding of the world itself, beyond the human, is understood in these teleological terms, which therefore feeds into this myth of progress toward perfection, that in a mind warped by hope, becomes projected onto the wider universe. Steinbeck continues this thought, leading into a discussion of humans as a unique species, but a species nonetheless: "And in saying that hope cushions the shock of experience, that one trait balances the

directionalism of another, a teleology is implied, unless one know or feel or think that we *are* here, and that without this balance, hope, our species in its blind mutation might have joined many, many others in extinction" (73). According to Steinbeck's research, however, species mutations have historically had a destructive, rather than survival value. Continuing, he writes, "We wonder, though, where in a man a mutation might take place. Man is the only animal whose interest and whose drive are outside himself" (73). Here, he highlights the human capacity to change and destroy the environment because of the hope and desires inherent in teleological thinking. Moreover, humans have gained the technical ability to alter the environment because of collective behavior and collective interest— "physiological man does not require this paraphernalia to exist, but the whole man does… He lives in his cities and his factories, in his business and job and art. But having projected himself into these external complexities, he *is* them. His house, his automobile are a part of him and a large part of him" (73). This resonates with Haraway's manifesto, which points out the ways that cyborg theory makes it unclear who is the maker and who is made in the relationship between humans and their tools. Again according to his research, Steinbeck explains that, when a man loses his material possessions, a result that happens often is sexual impotence. Steinbeck claims, "If then the projection, the preoccupation of man, lies in external things so that even his subjectivity is a mirror of houses and cars and grain elevators, the place to look for his mutation would be in the direction of his drive, or in other words in the external things he deals with" (73). The mutation, then, is clear within the Industrial Revolution—something that Steinbeck anticipates will become the cause of extinction in our species. As a novelist and cultural figure, Steinbeck has seen this mutation take place, but as a scientist and explorer, he figures the human species much more biocentrically than anthropocentrically. In

other words, he attacks these myths of progress and perfection of humanity for the impact that they have for the destruction of humans. He proposes an idea that the world will recover from the way we have altered it, even if humans have destroyed themselves—"We have made our mark on the world, but we have done nothing that the trees and creeping plants, ice and erosion, cannot remove in a fairly short time" (74). However, he anticipates that many people will consider this speculation to be treasonous to the species, saying, "For in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the trait of hope still controls the future, and man, not a species, but a triumphant race, will approach perfection, and finally, tearing himself free, will march up to the stars and take his place where, because of his power and virtue, he belongs: on the right hand of the $\pi - 1$" (73).

This long interjection deviates from his depictions of organisms and ecosystems on the gulf, but seeing those ecological systems, in the way they operate and the ways they have been disturbed, stirs something sentimental but serious in Steinbeck's perceptions of humanity. He knows that humans have placed so much emphasis on progress, most explicitly the progress of the Industrial Revolution, that they have submitted themselves to redefinition, become algorithmic more than natural. However, his scientific self refuses to recognize any sense of rightness or wrongness in this assessment; he looks at humans and their history as the progression of a species, exposing patterns in the same way he analyzes communities of fiddler-crabs and tube-worms. The notable thing about his analysis is his focus on humanity as a collective being; therefore, individuality is only a factor insofar as individuals act in the interest of the collective, civilization. More of this will be dealt with in the following chapter, which examines how Steinbeck's treatment of non-human beings complicates these ideas even further. For now, this chapter is about darkness, transgression, and death. For Morton,

"We choose and accept our own death, and the fact of mortality among species and ecosystems. This is the ultimate rationality: holding our mind open for the absolutely unknown that is to come. Evolution will not be televised. One cannot have a video of one's own extinction" (205). The mechanical cancer is not us, it is not technology, it is not culture, and it is not nature; it is none of these, or it is all. It is not evil or malignant, and it is.

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CHAPTER 3

To the Tide Pool and Back:

Interspecies Relations and Communication in *Cannery Row*

I began the last chapter with an attachment between humans and their mechanical tools, noting how this indicates the configuration of the human cyborg. I did not, however, address this connection as it can be thought of in tandem to the relation between humans and the non-human animal, not only as companions, but also as tools themselves, with equal ability to constitute the human and to disrupt our own sense of humanity in a similar way that technology does. John Steinbeck gestures toward this notion in the middle of a troublesome time of sea-faring in his memoir *The Log From the Sea of Cortez* (1951). He writes, "Tony, who knew his boat so well, could feel the yaw before it happened, could correct an error before it occurred. This is no longer reason or thought. One achieves the same feeling on a horse he knows well; one almost feels the horse's impulse in one's knees, and knows, but does not know, not only when the horse will shy, but the direction of his jump" (*The Log* 31). In *The Log* Steinbeck seems to engage with all the ways that non-human animals and humans come to intersect and inform each other's realities. He also, as shall become evident, recognizes humans as a species among other interdependent species. Cary Wolfe, in his introduction to *Animal Rites* (2003), cites an example of the difficulties of horse training given by Vicki Hearne. Hearne explains that horses are quite kinesthetically sensitive; being handled by inexperienced riders can become so confusing for a horse that they cannot know what movements have any meaning at all. Wolfe is concerned, then, with the position that this puts horse and rider in—that is, facing the knowledge of the independent existence and consciousness of the other, each with the ability to act in a way that might not be meaningful

to the other. This symmetrical situation—where both parties cannot fully know the other but still must have some knowledge of them—"is crucial for properly decentering the human and the visual from its privileged place as the transcendental signifier to which all other phenomenological differences are referred for meaning" (Wolfe 4). For Wolfe, the visual is categorized as specifically human, as he emphasizes a need to direct attention away from the act of looking to engage with other senses that are not so inextricably tied to what can be considered 'human' and therefore affirms traditional power relations (like those within Foucoult's panoptical gaze). Instead, Wolfe's desire is for the visual sense to be recast as a sense among many, not necessarily human, bodily senses. Although Haraway and other post-human, animal studies critics affirm the need for humans to *look*, specifically, at and with non-human others, Wolfe's point is not lost here. For one, it calls attention to the implications of the horse and rider connection, which are not so easily tossed aside. It is through a decentering of the human, an engagement with senses that are not uniquely human, that this connection is possible. In quite a physical way, the human must set aside some way of being that affirms separation between themselves and the animal, because they have to engage with a sense that is not their own. Already, the recognition of this connection underscores the fragility behind what Wolfe deems "speciesism" and human exceptionalism. What is more, relationships between humans and animals become potential spaces for exploring the entanglement of humans within their environment, in a way that particularly binds them to non-human others. It also foregrounds the necessity for bodily communication between species, which is an ongoing struggle in *Cannery Row*. Although Steinbeck's text has the ability to collapse traditional hierarchies between humans and animals, there is still something preventing fully successful interspecies communication within Steinbeck's

environmental observation. That something may just be the messiness involved in communication across species lines, but I need to be careful in just pointing out failures— for one, because this communication, though it is more productive in some instances and less in others, is always worth engagement. Besides, as is evident, success and failure are tenuous notions loosely attached to the evaluative frameworks of 'good' and 'bad.' Despite these moral reductions, though, success and failure are essential in the actions and interactions between species that allow us to realize ourselves alongside non-human others.

This chapter is about how human cyborgs in *Cannery Row* come to communicate with non-human animals and interpret that communication, rightly or wrongly (or rather, with varying degrees of success). It is also, not forgetting the definitional ambiguity of the human, about the figuring of humans and animals among an array of interdependent species. It is about the struggle, and frequent failure, for humans to recognize this configuration, what comes from that struggle, and how that makes impossible the task of claiming control over their narratives and environment. Animals appear in this novel in a myriad of ways—as companions, as Haraway would have it, as organisms of biological interest, as metaphors for humans, as community members themselves, and even as currency. The question is not just what role animals play in the structure of this novel, for they seem to be of at least the same importance as humans, who we have already established are constituted and complicated by their environment. The question might be, though, to what extent animal presences have the ability to emphasize the tenuousness of human identity and their own subjectivity. After all, if personhood is not what it seems to be, and that is partly because of its interdependence on non-human surroundings, animals are not fully exempt from the same crisis of identity. In the transgression of boundaries, all ends of the spectrum become affected by the others.

Before questioning the methods of communication between species, I am obliged to first acknowledge the ways that Steinbeck dismantles a human-centric ontology that maintains a hierarchical relationship between humans and animals. Perhaps we can begin with Donna Haraway's intentional use of the term 'species' as opposed to 'animal,' which has implications for humans, especially human belief systems that tie us to a notion that humans are even above being deemed a species. To make this argument, Haraway quotes Anna Tsing: "Species interdependence is a well known fact—except when it comes to humans. Human exceptionalism blinds us…. Human nature is an interspecies relationship" (qtd in Haraway *When Species Meet* 218). In *The Log*, Steinbeck warns about the dangers of this human exceptionalism, realizing the value in thinking of humans as a species among others. He writes:

> We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits so that we say, "This species typically does thus and so," but we do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well. When it seems that men may be kinder to men, that wars may not come again, we completely ignore the record of our species. (15)

In fact, throughout his account, Steinbeck consistently writes about the action of "looking" in a way that seems reciprocal. The tide pools respond and react actively, and through that correspondence, the biologist gains some understanding not just about the life of that species, but life as a species. Steinbeck writes about the "narrowing we observe in relation to ourselves and the tide pool—a man looking at reality brings his own limitations to the world.

If he has strength and energy of mind the tide pool stretches both ways" (71-2). In *The Log*, relations between species are the crux of his understanding of human histories, habits, and belief systems. It is why he refers to the development of hope as a sort of mutation in human evolutionary history. In thinking of human conflict as a recording of the behavior of a species, Steinbeck latches on to a theory that Haraway, Tsing, and Wolfe emphasized during the century that followed. Steinbeck's expedition with Ricketts and his crew thus indicates a moment of historical and literary significance. Although he does not go into detail, Amitav Ghosh recognizes this significance in *The Great Derangement* (2016). In parsing through the ways that the age of global warming has brought to the surface a new non-human critical voice, he mentions some examples, like Steinbeck, whose work can be re-situated now in full awareness of what we know about the future of the planet. Ghosh writes, "His work seems far from superseded; quite the contrary. What we see, rather, is a visionary placement of the human within the non-human; we see a form, an approach that grapples with climate change avant la lettre" (80). Indeed, during the rapidly rising and large-scale industrial and mechanical development of his century, Steinbeck looks intently at the tiniest of species living in, at that point, some of the most under examined parts of the world (the tide pools) to understand something about human life. The first understanding is that humans share significant ontological similarities with these other smaller species of animals. We do not need the list of species they collect, although he gives us extensive ones—*holothuria lubrica, astrometis sertulifera, octopus bimaculatus* (169). All we need is to know that he found and examined each of them in search of a specific understanding of each one. We must know this to be able to understand that, when he compares schools of tuna to human universities, he is not glossing over animal sentience and using it simply as a mirror for human behavior, as I

(and perhaps others) might have first assumed. But instead, he is ostensibly leveling the relational differences between species. For the modern post-human, any understanding of non-human others becomes turned back on the human, to apprehend the defiance of the uniquely human thought that we are somehow different from everything else that shares our planet, in a way that makes us non-reliant. Yet Steinbeck tears this down in a single observance: "The disappearance of plankton, although the components are microscopic, would probably in a short time eliminate every living thing in the sea and change the whole of man's life, if it did not through a seismic disturbance of balance eliminate all life on the globe" (178). Addressing then the relational nature of life that emerges when one studies relationships of animal to animal, he writes, "And then not only the meaning but the feeling about a species grows misty. One merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it" (178). Steinbeck's ecology becomes rather clear at this point, as he notes crucially that no form of life is exempt from a reliance on any other form of life. This is essential, because it puts *Cannery Row* into perspective. In the same passage of *The Log* he continues, "Then one can come back to the microscope and the tide pool and the aquarium. But the little animals are found to be changed, no longer set apart and alone" (178). So when Steinbeck, at the outset of his novel, compares the text and the setting of Cannery Row to the functioning of organisms in the tide pool, it is meant to be taken rather seriously. We should then arrive at the understanding that these two communities—that is, Cannery Row and the tide pools—one being smaller than the other, are not unequal and absolutely not unalike.

The critic John Kelley quotes the passage I blocked previously in order to draw a connection between Steinbeck and evolutionary psychologist David M. Buss (*The Evolution of Desire,* 1994), who argues for an understanding of human 'nature' that figures humans to be essentially peaceful and harmonious, only corrupted by "current conditions, such as patriarchy and capitalism," which Kelley couples with Steinbeck's mention of "the record of our species" (qtd. in Kelley 261). This might be a fair point, but Kelley's analysis emphasizes Steinbeck's conclusions over his methods, belaboring the point that many modern ways of living (including human's supposed superiority over animals) fall under Steinbeck's harsh voice of criticism, a voice that was censured by his contemporaries for the same reason that it warrants re-examination in our current era of climate instability. Particularly in *The Log*, Steinbeck is openly and directly critical of human exceptionalism, which is something that has given his adversaries much material for critique. In fact, nowhere is this human exceptionalism better illustrated than in some of Steinbeck's own critics. In a scathing review of *Cannery Row* that appeared in *The Nation* in January of 1945, Margaret Marshall writes, "In *Cannery Row* Mr. Steinbeck handles human beings as if they were a species of small animal life. They exist and have their being on the same level as the frogs and dogs, the cats and octopuses he is so fond of watching. Their "happiness" is that of insects, and his "love" for them is that of a collector. Conversely, and significantly, he humanizes frogs and dogs, cats and octopuses in a way that becomes at times repellent as well as embarrassing" (75). Marshall's words are not far from the truth, although the critique is misguided. Another example appears in a following paragraph of Marshall's review: "The unpleasant pleasure with which Steinbeck describes the killing of a mouse by a cat, the 'murder' of a crab by an octopus, the sadism of a small boy toward a smaller boy, is disturbing, to say the least. As for

the vulgarity which is a by-product of sentimentality, it is all too manifest here" (75). These few sentences are quite ironically helpful in getting to my point—that Steinbeck's narrative operates around interspecies communication (and human to human communication) that tries and often fails to be successful. Marshall continues, "Steinbeck's maudlin celebration of the automobile leads him to speak of one of his characters as 'the little mechanic of God,' 'the St. Francis of coils and armatures and gears.' It also leads him to the 'philosophical' statement that 'two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris'" (75). Finally, in an absolutely transparent moment of critique, Marshall unwittingly discloses the true reason why she finds this so repulsive: "It seems to be written out of a violent hatred of modern life, particularly of our money civilization" (75-6). Marshall's dispute with Steinbeck's text hinges on the sense of community established outside of money-based capital—maybe it is trading in frogs that perturbs her the most, or possibly that the narrative's focal characters do not make a steady income. As it happens, and is worth noting a little moment of serendipity, I found this review after writing the second chapter and, additionally, the following explication of the "disturbing" passage about the cat and mouse. I am quoting Marshall's litany of Steinbeck's transgressions for that reason and to remark on the astounding ability for his contemporaries to decidedly misunderstand his entire premise, which, as has become increasingly clear, was far too forward thinking for his time. That Marshall cannot deal with Steinbeck's critique of modern ways of living dependent on capitalism reveals something in itself. Moreover, the collapse of interspecies hierarchies and the moments of communication between species, as they shocked audiences of his time, are worth a full examination in light of a struggle for characters in the novel to gain control over their environment. Maybe, for Marshall, the most unconscionable aspect of this novel was

the revelation that categories of humanity are actually becoming more destabilized within the "money civilization" of the 1940s, and nowhere is this more apparent than through the connections between the human species and non-human others.

Another example comes from David Appel of the *Chicago Daily News*, who states: "The portraits all have the virtue of simplicity and a certain reality, but they never come alive. Under Steinbeck's ever present microscope they are tiny squirming social specimens just like their marine counterparts" (qtd. in Kelley 258). And Orville Prescott of the *New York Times* writes that in *Cannery Row,* "Men and women are… weak and contemptible animals" (qtd. in McElrath 383). Then in another review, Prescott states, "The general atmosphere is one of biological benevolence, or a sort of beaming approbation for human activities conducted on an unthinking level far below the demarcation line of pride, honesty, self- respect and accomplishment" (qtd. in McElrath 277). In all these cases, the fact that Steinbeck refuses to acknowledge a moral hierarchy and overall anthropocentrism is what people find most egregious. Steinbeck even addresses some ethical paradoxes within humans that result from a duality in similar morals listed by Prescott. He writes that qualities we deem as good are often markers of failure in a practically structured around those values we deem as theoretically bad. He remarks, "Thus, man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression toward extinction, but in the unthinking stimulus which really activates him he tends toward survival. Perhaps no other animal is so torn between alternatives" (*The Log* 80). He suggests that this is a result of a species still in a state of "*becoming*, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness" (80 emphasis added). Steinbeck's intention in this account seeks to understand humans as they come into being alongside other species.

Once it has been established, through this tension, that humanity exists on a level equal to coexisting species, the actual dynamics of interspecies relationships in *Cannery Row* can be brought to the forefront. For instance, Mary Talbot, wife of Tom Talbot and inhabitant of Cannery Row, is the protagonist of one, rather brief chapter in the latter half of Steinbeck's novel. She appears only once, plays no role in the plot development, and maybe was just intended as a humorous break from some building tension—Mack and the boys are discouraged by their failed attempt at a party, there is despondency on the Row, and Doc himself has experienced some chilling moments of darkness. Mary, however, passionately loves parties. She loves them so much, in fact, that she regularly hosts tea parties for the neighborhood cats. Steinbeck writes, "She set a footstool with doll cups and saucers. She gathered the cats, and there were plenty of them, and then she held long and detailed conversations with them" (152). On one of these occasions, Mary comes outside to invite Kitty Randolph and Kitty Casini to tea with "a few friends," (154) but she is highly upset by seeing Kitty Casini with a mouse in her paws. After she is initially distraught, Mary tries to reckon with the conflict between the reality she had imagined and what she had seen. She says, "I know how cats are. It isn't her fault. But—Oh, Tom! I'm going to have trouble inviting her again" (155). In her previous imagination, Mary had understood these cats not just as her friends, but to be *like* her friends—in other words, human. But here, Mary is forced to confront the animal as it is, even within her domesticated space. Even though the cat and mouse relation is a common image within such domestic spaces, it does not fit with what Mary imagines as cat behavior, because it is not what she imagines as human behavior. At first glance, this moment (and perhaps others) seem to be very obvious forms of anthropomorphism, wherein animal sentience gets disregarded over humans' imaginations of

animals. However, once human life is recognized as contingent and complicated, as I have demonstrated, these junctures where humans and animals cross also become definitively ambiguous.

Maybe what Mary is attempting is some sort of communication that upholds her ideas of humanity. Yet for the post-human, humanity has already been challenged, and self-certainty—especially at this moment in the novel—is not promised. Then, what is evident in Mary is a contingency on both sides of the human/non-human relationship. She is at the boundary of the nature/culture divide, attempting to bring nature into her culture, which is why this game of cat and mouse, literally, is so shocking to her. Because nature has been inducted into her culture, she must recognize something in herself that is contingent. What happens is shocking to her possibly because it reflects what Mary cannot deal with in herself. This is the problem of recognition, but there is also a problem of communication. Donna Haraway, in her critique of Derrida's citation of an episode with his cat, when he finds himself naked in the bathroom in front of the cat, writes that he "failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning" (*When Species Meet* 20). It is arguable that Mary Talbot is making quite a similar mistake. Despite having been apparently engaged in constant communication with these cats, Mary fails to understand a certain "embodied communication" that Haraway mentions in *When Species Meet* (26). In the scene, Mary looks first at Kitty Randolph who is "sunning herself by the front fence" (Steinbeck 154). She politely invites this first cat to tea, who then rolls over "languorously on her back and stretched in the warm sun" (154). She tells Kitty Randolph not to be late and then turns to Kitty Casini who is acting in an equally cat-like

way, but one that is much more shocking and disturbing to her. However, the modes that interspecies relationships employ to communicate outside of verbal language, according to Haraway, demonstrate the way interacting bodies tell a certain truth. Haraway writes:

> The truth or honesty of nonlinguistic embodied communication depends on looking back and greeting significant others, again and again. This sort of truth or honesty is not some trope-free, fantastic kind of natural authenticity that only animals can have while humans are defined by the happy fault of lying denotatively and knowing it. Rather, this truth telling is about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding esteem, and regard open to those who look back reciprocally. Always tripping, this kind of truth has a multispecies future. (*When Species Meet* 27)

Like all categories in Haraway's theoretical approach, those of "human" and "culture" are dangerous. To think categorically, for the post-humanist, is an indication of the attempt of reason to dominate a world that nevertheless remains messy and muddy. Haraway resists by insisting that we live in "naturecultures," in an intertwined ontology of both nature and culture, where neither term presupposes the other. Thus, our lives are processes of "becoming with" (16) companion species—more complex and multifaceted than companion animals—endlessly amidst complex relations. Communication between species becomes a subject of significance, for both Haraway and Steinbeck, but that relationship is not without its complexities and potentially inevitable failure.

Haraway, expanding on the quote from Anna Tsing, writes, "Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention" (*When Species Meet*

19). For Haraway, interdependence is more than just passive recognition, but active communication. Whether or not that is active in sensory communication beyond just the visual, as for Wolfe, or just looking between species, as for Derrida, the emphasis is in the attempt on both sides for meaningful interaction. She continues, "Not much is excluded from the needed play, not technologies, commerce, organisms, landscapes, peoples, practices. I am not a posthumanist; I am who I *become* with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind" (19 emphasis added). Becoming, again, is active development, happening along with the becoming of other species. Haraway insists that, with our companion species, we go through a sort of ontological remodeling, one where nature and culture are revealed to be inseparable. Again, Steinbeck's words anticipate this, insisting on the same state of "*becoming*, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival" (*The Log* 80). The aspect of physical memories also calls attention to this remodeling, or becoming, being historically transferred through bodies and minds, which is a shared history of space and culture, insisting on the impacts of space and culture on each other. Companions, and our interactions with them, play a vital role in the apprehension of this history, which reveals something about the human, even if that something causes a profound discomfort.

The next companion relationship I want to grapple with is between Mack and the Boys and their female pointer, Darling. Mack acquires Darling in about the same way that he does everything, that is, a little bit of sweet talking, ulterior motives, and deception. Mack and the Boys, in their attempt to raise money to throw a party for Doc, look no further than their own environment. They know that Doc needs frogs for his research, that Doc will pay a fine price for these frogs, and all they need to do is gather some frogs that they can sell to

Doc for his own party. As they set out to capture some frogs in a pond on private property, they are at first foiled by their encounter with the Captain, the irate but potentially lonesome property owner. In typical Mack fashion, he talks himself out of trouble and into good favor. The first topic of conversation between these two men is the pointer dog; Mack says, "By God that's a fine-lookin' bitch" (83). In response, the Captain explains that the dog is weak from a tick bite and recently giving birth to puppies. Mack, capitalizing on an opportunity, offers to treat the dog's wound with some epsom salts, thus earning him an invitation into the Captain's home and access to his pond for frog collecting. The suffering apparent in this animal shifts the dynamic between these two humans and rearranges the plot, granting a certain amount of agency to the non-human in their ability to rearrange possible events. Moreover, the presence of his dog is what allows Mack to humanize and soften the Captain; she is not just a topic of conversation then. She is indeed an active presence in this episode; whether or not she participates in dialogue, there is an undercurrent of communication among these three individuals of two different species. In evidence of this, the next scene between Mack and the Captain begins with Mack gazing down at the dog, nursing her tick bite. Steinbeck writes, "Among her legs the big fat wiener pups nuzzled up into Mack's face saying, 'You see how it is? I try to tell him but he doesn't understand'" (89). In a novel wavering between success and failure—even complicating those very tenuous notions—for Mack, this is a moment that appears to be successful, so it is important to assess. Haraway writes about intercommunication when species meet being built on looking and touching, but these actions are tied to real responsibility and accountability. She asserts, "Touch, regard, looking back, becoming with—all these make us responsible in unpredictable ways for which worlds take shape" (36). In the mutual interaction between Mack and this dog, there is a back

and forth, a sharing that should not be glossed over. Mack looks with respect and sincerity. The moment resonates with Haraway's notion that "caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (36). Unlike Mary Talbot and her cats, this is a moment of tenderness between species, where pain is felt and shared. Mack not only looks at the dog, but he waits for her to respond, knowing and sympathizing with her pain. It is this care that inspires the Captain to offer Mack one of his pups.

However, Mack and the boys' relationship with Darling is much more complicated. With the entrance of Darling into their own space, the Palace Flophouse, Darling takes on her own agency, which challenges their authority and disturbs their dynamic. Steinbeck describes the way her presence affects the household:

> Darling was and was destined to remain a very happy dog, for in the group of five men there were five distinct theories of dog training, theories which clashed so that Darling never got any training at all. From the first she was a precocious bitch. She slept on the bed of the man who had given her the last bribe. They really stole for her sometimes. They wooed her away from one another. Occasionally all five agreed that things had to change and that Darling must be disciplined, but in the discussion of method the intention invariably faded away. They were in love with her. They found the little puddles she left on the floor charming. They bored all their acquaintances with her cuteness and they would have killed her with food if in the end she hadn't better sense than they. (119)

Here, the Palace Flophouse becomes a shared space of cohabitation with a non-human other that Mack and the Boys love, but they form a relationship that gestures toward the complexity within the meeting spaces between dogs and humans. At first glance, one might assume that this is a subversion of power, and that Darling's agency is an indication that she has gained control over her household, thus winning a victory for non-human subjectivity. Indeed she does become a part of the social unit of the Palace Flophouse, and she is represented as their equal companion. However, there is tension between species, and, like many relationships in Cannery Row, they do not live necessarily in simple harmonious coexistence: "She chewed the blankets, tore the mattresses, sprayed the feathers out of the pillows. She coquetted and played her owners against one another. They thought she was wonderful. Mack intended to teach her tricks and go in vaudeville and he didn't even housebreak her" (120). Arguably, Steinbeck seems to be commenting on the complexity of interspecies cohabitation between Mack and the Boys and Darling. Although they coexist as equal residents at the Palace Flophouse, there still seems to be a muddled sense of what is human behavior and what is dog behavior, complicating the links between human species and dog species. Later, he writes that "having a thousand generations of training behind her, [Darling] began to train herself. She got disgusted with wetting on the floor and took to going outside" (157). That Darling is forced to train herself speaks to a negligence, in Haraway's words, "to perform respect with [the] body and eyes" (*The Companion Species Manifesto* 133). While the boys love Darling, they do not "perform" respect by looking her in the eyes, insisting that she also "perform" the actions of a trained companion. Their love, without insisting on mutual respect, only infantilizes the dog, as they refuse to honor difference between species. This leaves Darling in the space between human and dog, not fully

committed to the performance of either one, which maintains a separation between herself and the boys. On one hand, Darling is a free agent in her behavior within the house. On the other, she is the object of jaded affection; the burden of training, the performance of respect that Haraway speaks of, falls on her, since the boys are so blinded by love— love without understanding of needs. What results is a cohabitation that does not truly benefit either party, something that becomes evident after Mack's first party for Doc: "[Darling] spent the day under Mack's bed happily eating up his shoes ... Twice in his black despair, Mack reached under the bed and caught her and put her in bed with him for company but she squirmed out and went back to eating his shoes" (139-40). Because Mack has not insisted on mutual respect, has failed to honor difference, he does not live out his own insistence that, "There ain't no dog like a pointer for a man" (89).

This unharmonious relationship underscores what Haraway insists, that we need "knowledge of the job of a kind of dog, the whole dog, the specificity of dogs. Otherwise, love kills, unconditionally, both kinds and individuals" (*The Companion Species Manifesto* 131). What Haraway speaks of here is not a denouncement of love for dogs, but a warning against the value of *unconditional* love between species companions. Claiming that child-like love of one's dog is demeaning to both dogs and children, Haraway suggests thinking of dogs as living in "'other worlds' in a science fictional sense" (126). This view requires humans to understand dogs for their "significant otherness" and to be dedicated to a bodily, worldly, interactive love, different from the "neurotic fantasy" of unconditional love (126). For understanding this moment in Steinbeck's text, it is essential to re-examine the qualities of consideration, because what matters in this exchange is the messiness that is being brought to the surface of interspecies interaction. Success and failure become arbitrary measurements in

the search for intimate knowledge of the other, the non-human species. In some regard, love gets in the way for Mack and the Boys; their doting becomes demeaning. Yet it also serves to emphasize the ways that attempts at communication along species lines can gesture toward the multispecies future, which is "always tripping" (*When Species Meet* 27).

For Haraway, humans and animals have a continuous contract they build with one another, and a violation of that contract can be mutually harmful. When these relationships are harmonious, though, it is mutually beneficial to both species. But interdependence does not have to mean harmony, does it? After all, murder is an attempt at communication. This idea returns us to the tide pool—a recursive action that Steinbeck would most likely approve of—back to the instance of Marshall's disturbance at the 'murderous' octopus. I mentioned in the second chapter the way Steinbeck catalogues these systems in the tide pool to gesture toward the circularity of repetition on the Row, systems wherein the natural and mechanical become conflated to mirror the human. Within these processes, there are occurrences of communication. "Here a crab tears a leg from his brother. The anemones expand like soft and brilliant flowers," Steinbeck observes, "inviting any tired and perplexed animal to lie for a moment in their arms, and when some small crab or little tide-pool Johnie accepts the green and purple invitation, the petals whip in, the stinging cells shoot tiny narcotic needles into the prey and it grows weak and perhaps sleepy while the searing caustic digestive acids melt its body down" (31). In understanding Steinbeck's environmental fascination and the way it underscores the methods used to put down this narrative on the page, this passage matters. Here, the imaginations of the biologist and the novelist converge in interesting and transdisciplinary ways. Without his biological understanding, the tide pool of the novel is two dimensional—where interactions exist only as metaphorical relations; but it cannot be

overlooked that he also knows deeply what is happening biologically in the earthly tide pools, has seen it, and seen himself through it, not always metaphorically.

Contemporary ecocritical work by Cary Wolfe might serve to illuminate what I mean here. In *Animal Rites*, Wolfe uses the theoretical framework of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela on the evolutionary emergence of "linguistic domains" (80) to understand how animal interaction can actually be thought of as communication. Maturana and Varela claim that "sufficient cephalization"—a certain concentration and density of neural tissue—forms the baseline physiological structure that an animal must have to be able to physically produce "third-order structural couplings," which then provide the basis for "linguistic domains" (81). These linguistic domains do extend to the ability to communicate, but not in the same way for all organisms, and different from the phenomenal domain of language in humans. The notion provides a basis for the ontological similarities between humans and other organisms, even if they are phenomenologically distinct. Linguistic domains, being separate from the domain of language, mean that animals are engaged in the production of behaviors that "constitute the basis for language," even if they are not identical to language (83). Wolfe quotes their assertion that, "The function of the nervous system diversifies tremendously with an increase in the variety of neuronal interactions, which entails growth in the cephalic portion… In other words, this increase in cephalic mass carries with it enormous possibilities for structural plasticity of the organism" (qtd. in Wolfe 81). For them, this physiological structure is essential for the function of learning in an animal. Moreover, this learning is a result of "structural changes" within the nervous system, self-developing biological systems with autonomy, or "operational closure," that embody the processes of adaptive changes (81). Hinging on Maturana and Varela's claim that all living organisms are

"autopoietic" unities (or "continually self-producing" according to individual requirements), Wolfe follows that "they are in a crucial sense *closed* and self-referential in terms of what constitutes their *specific* mode of existence, even as they are *open* to the environment on the level of their material structure" (81). An important distinction arises that these autopoietic unities are not directed by environmental structures, but are merely triggered by them. Disturbances in the environment do not determine the interaction of the animal with its environment, but instead, it is the structure of the disturbed system, which can still be triggered by structural couplings to their environment and other organisms within it. When interactions occur between these systems, in animals with enough cephalization and plasticity, it becomes possible for those interactions to become recurrent in nature. This claim is what leads Maturana and Varela to the assertion that, "When these interactions between specific ontogenies become recurrent, organisms develop a '*new phenomenological domain': 'third-order structural couplings,'* or a 'social life for short' (qtd in Wolfe 82). For example, Maturana explains two distinct types of interaction among organisms. The first occurs when the behavior of one organism directly triggers the behavior of another—say, the octopus finds a prey, and that prey, realizing it is being hunted, attempts to swim away. The second, and less direct, happens when one organism "orients" the behavior of another, in other words, directs attention to another interaction that the two share in common. It is in this type of interaction, where the orienting behavior represents something outside of the self, that symbolizes the basis for linguistic domains (the domain of descriptions), insofar as it is symbolic action that becomes a description of the organism's own environment. I explain all this *not* to assert that these animals are communicating in a pre-language but still 'linguistic' way, and therefore we maintain the right to reductively anthropomorphize them. On the

contrary, the point is to understand that communication is going on, and in a very real, nonrepresentational sense. For Maturana and Varela, these types of communication are necessary so that "the social animal will maintain the autopoiesis of the social structure" (Wolfe 83). This is relevant for the next scene, so that when Doc and Hazel choose to interact with each other about animals, they are commenting on these methods of communication. They make observations that reflect not just animal behavior, but human observations of animal behavior, which is quite circular—I realize—but a circularity that provides particular insight about humans as observers and interlocutors with animals, who among themselves, also communicate.

After this description, Steinbeck launches into a description of Hazel, who is a striking image of the passivity and sense of ease that is essential to life in Cannery Row. Hazel, as Kelley has pointed out, is a source of contention for many critics who say that Steinbeck demeans "low-life" human beings by using animal metaphors to depict them (256). And it is partially true; in this episode, Hazel is clearly introduced as an individual with some sort of cognitive disability. For Kelley, though, Steinbeck is not demeaning Hazel (or for that matter, any other human characters) in his parallels with the animal world, for Steinbeck's deep love and respect for the animal world has already been revealed. What is more important than the individuals, especially as I am concerned, is the exchange between individuals, as that exchange hinges on the non-human presences which they are engulfed in. As Doc and Hazel collect organisms in the pool, they converse—for, though Hazel has repeatedly asked the same questions, we learn that Hazel loves and craves the tone of conversation, as he continually interrogates Doc but does not listen to the answers. They discuss the starfish, the other boys, the work of Henri the painter who loves boats but hates

water; as the conversation halts, Hazel, who finds himself desperate to keep it going, asks Doc about the stink bugs. The text reads, "'Look at all them stink bugs,' Hazel remarked, grateful to the bugs for being there" (33). Doc remarks that they are interesting, and Hazel asks why they stick their "asses" up in the air, but Doc has never found out exactly why. The conversation that follows is typical of this book—Doc becomes an absurd but somehow insightful voice of wisdom, and the boys do not feel the need to challenge him. Hazel asks:

> 'Well why do you think they do it?'
>
> 'I think they're praying,' said Doc.
>
> 'What!' Hazel was shocked.
>
> 'The remarkable thing, said Doc, 'isn't that they put their tails up in the air—the really remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable. We can only use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did something as inexplicable and strange we'd probably be praying—so maybe they're praying.'
>
> 'Let's get the hell out of here,' said Hazel. (34)

There are two approaches here. For one, Hazel is resistant to anything he cannot know; earlier in the conversation he dismisses Henri the painter as being "nuts" for spending years on a boat that he never plans to take to the ocean. After all, Hazel looks "upon himself as a crystal pool of clarity and on his life as a troubled glass of misunderstood virtue" (36). Yet, like Mary Talbot, Hazel cannot grapple with the life that is not his own, even to the point that he cannot comprehend reasoning beyond that which circulates his own thoughts. His searches for meaning occur internally, so that when questions are asked that cannot be answered that way, he avoids them. He is his own closed system. Doc's approach is a similar

avoidance, but one that suggests a thinking of humans in the same unsolvable way, noting that human behaviors are just as inexplicable. It gestures beyond the anthropocentrism of the era. There is a similar moment in *The Log,* when Steinbeck observes that, in seeing schools of fish lying in the water, all pointing in the same direction, one might remark that it is unusual behavior. However, Steinbeck insists, it is not unusual at all—"We begin at the wrong end. They simply lie that way, and it is remarkable only because with our blunt tool we cannot carve out a human reason" (*The Log* 136). All this gestures toward Wolfe's summarization of Niklas Luhmann's distinction between first and second-order observation, and its convergence with Maturana and Varela, who note that "the nervous system may operate by way of its own autopoietic closure, but 'we as observers have access both to the nervous system and to the structure of its environment'" (qtd. in Wolfe 89). However, any attempt to describe the behavior of an organism and the operations of its nervous system within that environment cannot reflect the operation of the nervous system in itself. They contend, "These descriptions… are good only for the purposes of communication among ourselves as observers" (qtd. in Wolfe 89). To find a way out of this conundrum, Wolfe proposes thinking about Luhmann's idea of second-order observation wherein, "we are observing observations—and observing, moreover, how those observations are constructed atop a blindness to the wholly contingent nature of their constitutive distinction" (90). In the context of this re-framing, it is possible to suggest that, when Doc offers the solution that "maybe they're praying," it becomes less a statement of dismissal and more of an observation on observing— a recognition of the blind state in which we establish conclusions based on observations. In this way, there is communication happening everywhere within this tide pool setting, from animal to animal, human to animal, and human to human, but is any of

it really successful? Moreover, is it necessary that it be successful? As is clear, maybe the framework of success and failure can even be challenged and destabilized, so that early in the novel, we are alerted to the contingencies of interspecies interaction and, moreover, the striking realization of a complete lack of control over those contingencies, even an ability to understand them at any level. In short, "The process of gathering knowledge does not lead to knowing" (*The Log* 137).

In the story of complexity and levels of failure in communication, it is at last necessary to examine where that leaves us; for *Cannery Row* it opens us to the inability for control—in a physical sense, control over environment, and in a textual sense, control over narrative. First, I must address Mack and the boys' attempt to do business with Lee Chong using frogs. This is done in order to fund Doc's first party, and on the promise that live frogs are exactly the same as money, seeing as Doc needs them for research; they represent the promise of capital, and are therefore traded as capital. Using frogs for commerce is, in a sense, a way for Mack and the boys to move forward in their plan and at the same time gain some control over their environment, as that environment hinges on community, and Lee Chong's, the site of exchange, is the fulcrum of that community. In a lot of ways, the frogs are indicative of excess, something not common on the Row, especially economic excess. And in that sense, the account of greed that follows can become quite problematic, insofar as Steinbeck's nostalgia seeps in to suggest that impoverished communities might do just as well to stay that way. He writes, "The poison of greed was already creeping into the innocent and laudable merchandising agreement. Bitterness was piling up. But in Lee's packing case the frogs were piling up too" (119). However, the excess also implies the difference in beings with agency and non-agentive materials, something that should be obvious but is not to the

inhabitants of the Row. The collection and trading of frogs only ends, at the final moments of Doc's first party, which destroys his laboratory and he is never even present for, with a mass escape of frogs: "For quite a while a little river of frogs hopped down the steps, a swirling, moving river. For quite a while Cannery Row crawled with frogs—was overrun with frogs" (127). Thus the presence of this "river of frogs" becomes a reminder of that inability to claim complete control over their environment.

The second result of this failure then comes again at the final moments of the second party and is in the ineffectiveness for the citizens of Cannery Row to gain control over their narrative. It is also a failure of communication happening between humans, and potentially a productive failure in the narrative voice. The poem "Black Marigolds," which Doc reads at the end, allows the party to reach a somber note. When Doc finishes reading, some are weeping, others just wipe tears from their eyes: "But a little world-sadness had slipped over all of them. Everyone was remembering a lost love, everyone a call" (187). Shortly after, a crew from a San Pedro tuna boat shows up, a raging fight breaks out, and the cops enter—the scene is a mixture of sadness, anger, and still drunken contentment. The poem is meant to be a medium of communication, but it remains unfinished in this chapter; only when Doc is alone, cleaning his laboratory after the party, does he finish reciting it to himself, with a sting of sadness. As Doc finishes this narrative alone, isolated in his own laboratory, and still separate from the rest of the community on the Row, this might seem to shatter the idyllic vision of Cannery Row. Yet there is another way to look at it, one that opens the narrative to a broader sense that communication is not overlooked in these last moments, even as the poem itself allows Doc to communicate with voices in different spaces and temporal planes. The first stanza deals with communication inside the poem: "Even now/ I mind the coming

and talking of wise men from the towers/ Where they had thought away their youth. And I, listening,/ Found not the salt whispers of my girl" (195). The speaker contrasts such talking and thinking with the experiences of living and loving, and Steinbeck interjects his narrative voice into each stanza of the poem, with depictions of the natural setting outside of Doc's window, which allows the setting to mirror and converse with the poem's speaker. Doc glances out of the window, notices the waves and the noises of his laboratory rats and the water flowing into the sink, and speaks the last stanza aloud to himself and to these others: "Even now,/ I know that I have savored the hot taste of life…/ Just for a small and a forgotten time/ I have had full in my eyes from off my girl/ The whitest pouring of eternal light—" (196). These last few pages present layers of interaction happening between a cacophony of voices. For one, the voice of "Black Marigolds" communicates with its own past voice, which allows the poem to convey two separate histories in the speaker's life, that of a former love and of the current time spent recounting that love. The way this poem bridges the last three chapters together is also indicative of significant contact between literary voices, insofar as it transmits information where Doc's own voice fails him. He is then allowed to interface with and through the speaker, with and through the natural world, and across vast gaps of time and space. For these last instances, Steinbeck's narrative extends outside of itself to do some meta work, gesturing toward a potential for literature to hold a means of communication when human communication cannot perform. Maybe speaking and loving are different means to the same end, that is, to engage in meaningful and reciprocal interaction. Where physical action (exchange) is unable to accomplish these ends, is that where literature intervenes to settle for representation instead of real communication? Or rather, does representation aid in the accomplishment of real communication? I think here it

does. What is more, literature re-engages us in discourse that happens trans-species, trans-temporally, and trans-spatially. Steinbeck's ending leaves room for other voices to continue this crucial argument. His last sentence—"And behind the glass the rattlesnakes lay still and stared into space with their dusty frowning eyes" (196)—glances at a future where the need for dialogue, one that looks *at*, *with*, and *as* non-human others, becomes glaringly apparent.

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CODA

Frogicentrism, Sandslash, COVID-19, and the Threat to Reality

On March 25, 1940, the crew of the *Western Flyer* reach the port of Puerto Escondido and are picked up and brought to shore by a small canoe of locals at the harbor. These locals take Steinbeck and his crew for a short trip into the remote areas of the mountains to camp and to "hunt" (although, to their own relief, they never end up killing anything). While in the mountains, Steinbeck and Ricketts look at tree frogs and horse-hair worms and wonder aloud how they got into such a small and secluded mountain stream. As they glance at them in semi-disbelief, Steinbeck comments on the nature of knowing: "An answer is invariably the parent of a great family of new questions. So we draw worlds and fit them like tracings against the world about us, and crumple them when they do not fit and draw new ones" (137). This attempt in humans to understand the world around us, and the frustration at the inability to, continues to disrupt the present, especially at the onslaught of climate-related events, a serious example of which is happening right now in the pandemic of COVID-19, unsettling our daily lives in an unprecedented way. In a slightly humorous, but profound image of this, Steinbeck imagines a reversal of roles: "The tree-frog in the high pool in the mountain cleft, had he been endowed with human reason, on finding a cigarette butt in the water might have said, 'Here is an impossibility. There is no tobacco hereabouts nor any paper. Here is evidence of fire and there has been no fire'" (137). Instead of presenting human reason as a trait of superiority, Steinbeck effectively sums up its undoing, as the frog continues, "'This thing cannot fly nor crawl nor blow in the wind. In fact this thing cannot be and I will deny it, for if I admit that this thing is here the whole world of frogs is in danger, and from there it is only one step to anti-frogicentrism.' And so that frog will for the rest of

his life try to forget that something that is, is" (137). Imagining the ridiculousness at such a situation has the potential to undo any stable sense of superiority in human reason, and Steinbeck uses this instance to point out exactly that ridiculousness, as it were reversed.

Amitav Ghosh's argument in *The Great Derangement* (2016) might prove useful for grappling with this situation and its threat to human reason, insofar as he insists that climate change has the capacity to challenge our construction of reality and our sense of ourselves, which is ostensibly rooted in the notion of a stable climate. In particular, Ghosh's discussion of the uncanny calls for a re-assessment of ourselves within the current climate; in the inherent uncanniness of climate change—that is, changing weather conditions and the uncertainty but familiarity of their effects—we are stirred to the sense of recognition "that we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts who share elements of that which we had thought to be most distinctively our own: the capacities of will, thought, and consciousness" (30-1). Here, the tree-frog sees something he believes to be uncanny in the mountain stream, something, moreover, that alerts him to the fact that there are other presences in his environment. Now he is not only not alone, but he is aware that he and his surroundings are affected by something other. He is aware too of what this awareness does for his framework of reason. Ghosh writes, "Non-human forces have the ability to intervene directly in human thought. And to be alerted to such interventions is also to become uncannily aware that conversations among ourselves have always had other participants" (31). This tree-frog's existential crisis also resonates with Ghosh's claims about non-human sentience and the way other presences have played a part in shaping our discussions, while we have been unaware; he asks, "Can we help but suspect that all the time that we imagined ourselves to be thinking about apparently inanimate objects, we were ourselves being 'thought' by other entities?"

(31). For Ghosh, to reckon with climate change is to acknowledge its uncanniness, especially in the way it brings our attention to the non-human, and not just to their existence, but to their consciousness and communication—to their possession of abilities previously thought of as uniquely human. So, at the sight of the cigarette butt, this tree-frog has had the rug of reason pulled out from under him; the very framework of his self-awareness has been threatened, and he chooses to deny it. Like Hazel, like Mary and Mack, he squirms in discomfort at the knowledge of qualities in others that are not like his, that are other but at the same time familiar and not. "Frogicentrism" is quirky in frogs and dangerous in humans, whose denial of other presences in the world can quickly and irrevocably alter it.

I think in the ongoing crisis of COVID-19, we have been forced to confront some of this undoing. We could call it uncanny how this moment seems to punctuate my writing this, and it seems compulsory to address its uncanniness. In fact, it actually feels like it is all I can write about at the moment. The roots of this crisis reach far into the history of civilization, and they have grown strong enough to burst through the ground of our reality to completely and irreversibly alter it. My anticipation is that this is only the beginning. If this seems like an overreaction, then consider the crisis at its very source, which as is widely speculated now, is assumed to be the pangolin, historically said to be the most trafficked mammal, besides humans (Yu). The animal who evolved to have only one defense: to roll into a ball. The mammal that inspired the Pokemon "Sandslash," which transformed the pangolin into plastic cards worth more protection than the life they chose to represent. Along with the belief that pangolin scales have medicinal properties, these animals are hunted for wealthy people with tastes for "wild" animals, making pangolins one out of many on a long list of species who are hunted, killed, and sold at ridiculous prices in China's wet markets (Yu). In

an opinion article written for the *New York Times*, Wufei Yu speculates that COVID-19 could be their revenge "for bringing them to the edge of extinction." Yu's article explains that bans on poaching and selling pangolins are in place, but they contain loopholes that allow for pangolin exploitation for reasons such as medicine and health, which means that laws in place do not do much to protect the dying population of pangolins. He suggests that, instead of relying on legislation, the solution must be in century old texts that dispel rumors claiming medicinal properties of pangolin scales and meat. Returning to these texts, according to Yu, would have the potential to undo some long-held beliefs about the properties of these exploited animals. Health, history, and wealth come under threat in the presence of destabilization caused by centuries of practices, which we can now recognize as threatening not only to the exploited species, but to the species doing such exploitative work. Yu's article, of course, is just speculation—seeing as it has not been confirmed that pangolins are even the source of the virus—but it represents a necessary shift that is happening because of these events. In the mutually destructive action of exploiting a "natural resource," to satisfy the "wild" tastes of the wealthy, we have not only almost wiped out an entire species but have also unwittingly threatened the health of our own species. Now it becomes apparent just how harmful we are to ourselves, to our realities that have only been constructed, to our rights and identities.

We have also found, overwhelmingly, that we are ready to sign away our basic rights in this time of crisis, which gestures toward a sense that even our political and economic realities are bound up in the illusion of a stable climate, that, moreover, this is beyond even the potential reach of political action. The call for stricter restrictions of movement is echoed across the country, deemed necessary for the safety of Americans, showing in this regard

how climate and related crises have the potential to upend our political structures and personal liberties that are granted by those political structures. Additionally, we are seeing evidence of how these crises transcend any one place or nation, affecting individuals and communities in ways that challenge borders between places. Ghosh writes, "We have entered, as Timothy Morton says, the age of hyperobjects, which are defined in part by their stickiness, their ever-firmer adherence to our lives: even to speak of the weather, that safest of subjects, is now to risk a quarrel with a denialist neighbor. No less than they mock the discontinuities and boundaries of the nation-state do these connections defy the boundedness of 'place,' creating continuities of experience between Bengal and Louisiana, New York and Mumbai, Tibet and Alaska" (62). The problem of COVID 19 is a problem of the Anthropocene, a world wherein these "continuities" become vast and pressing, which do not stop at boundaries either political or spatial.

It becomes at once overwhelming and existentially alarming to face the fact that everything everywhere is unraveling before us, but there might be some hope in it, if it is possible to find hope in existential threat. On an individual level, this situation forces us to recalibrate how we construct identity and reality, because we can no longer claim stability as a human species occupying a hostile planet. We have seen this in the pandemic that has brought society, economy, and even our daily lives to a screeching halt. We have seen, hopefully, that our current ways of living are no longer sustainable for our health and safety as a species. We have seen the revenge of the pangolins and the dangers of frogicentrism in humans, and must come to the understanding that, at the very least, we can no longer deny the presence of non-human others whose realities come to inform ours, who might no longer stand idly by while we encroach upon their worlds.

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Vita

Sarah Rebekah Ballard was born in Charlotte, North Carolina to Janet and Steve Ballard. She graduated from Hickory Ridge High school in Harrisburg in June 2012. The following autumn, she entered Appalachian State University to study English and Secondary Education, and in May 2016 she was awarded the Bachelor of Science degree. After two years of teaching and other experience, she accepted a graduate assistantship and returned to Appalachian State University to begin work on a Master of Arts degree in English.

The M.A. shall be awarded in May 2020. Mrs. Ballard plans to go on to teach composition at a community college or undergraduate university level.