PENGUIN CLASSICS

JOHN STEINBECK

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

PENGUIN BOOKS

The Grapes of Wrath

Born in Salinas, California, in 1902, John Steinbeck grew up in a fertile agricultural valley about twenty-five miles from the Pacific Coast – and both valley and coast would serve as settings for some of his best fiction. In 1919 he went to Stanford University, where he intermittently enrolled in literature and writing courses until he left in 1925 without taking a degree. During the next five years he supported himself as a labourer and journalist in New York City, all the time working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). After marriage and a move to Pacific Grove, he published two Californian fictions, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), and worked on short stories later collected in *The Long Valley* (1938). Popular success and financial security came only with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), stories about Monterey's paisanos. A ceaseless experimenter throughout his career, Steinbeck changed course regularly. Three powerful novels of the late 1930s focused on the Californian labouring class: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and the book considered by many his finest, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Early in the 1940s, Steinbeck became a filmmaker with *The Forgotten Village* (1941) and a serious student of marine biology with *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He devoted his services to the war, writing *Bombs Away* (1942) and the controversial play-novelette *The Moon is Down* (1942). *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *The Pearl* (1947), *A Russian Journal* (1948), another experimental drama, *Burning Bright* (1950), and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951) preceded publication of the monumental *East of Eden* (1952), an ambitious saga of the Salinas Valley and his own family's history. The last decades of his life were spent in New York City and Sag Harbor with his third wife, with whom he travelled widely. Later books include *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (1957), *Once There was a War* (1958), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), *America and Americans* (1966) and the post-humously published *Journal of a Novel: The 'East of Eden' Letters* (1969), *Viva*

Zapata! (1975), *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976) and *Working Days: The Journals of 'The Grapes of Wrath'* (1989). He died in 1968, having won a Nobel Prize in 1962.

Robert DeMott is Edwin and Ruth Kennedy Distinguished Professor at Ohio University, where he has received numerous undergraduate and graduate teaching awards, including the Jeanette G. Grasselli Faculty Teaching Award in 1997. He is a former director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University, and is currently on the Editorial Board of the Center's *Steinbeck Newsletter*. He is Editor (with Elaine Steinbeck as Special Consultant) of the Library of America's three-volume edition of John Steinbeck's writings, of which *Novels and Stories, 1932–1937* (1994) and *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings, 1936–1942* (1996) have so far appeared. His annotated edition of John Steinbeck's *Working Days: The Journals of 'The Grapes of Wrath'* was chosen as a *New York Times* Notable Book in 1989, and his *Steinbeck's Typewriter: Essays on His Art* (1996) received the Nancy Dasher Book Award from the College English Association of Ohio in 1998.

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With an Introduction by Robert DeMott

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To **CAROL** *who willed it.*
To **TOM** *who lived it.*

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Introduction

"What some people find in religion a writer may find in his craft… a kind of breaking through to glory."

—*Steinbeck in a 1965 interview*

I

On June 18, 1938, a little more than three weeks after starting *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck confided in his daily journal (posthumously published as *Working Days*):

If I could do this book properly it would be one of the really fine books and a truly American book. But I am assailed with my own ignorance and inability. I'll just have to work from a background of these. Honesty. If I can keep an honesty it is all I can expect of my poor brain.… If I can do that it will be all my lack of genius can produce. For no one else knows my lack of ability the way I do. I am pushing against it all the time.

Despite Steinbeck's doubts, which were constant during its tumultuous process of composition, *The Grapes of Wrath* turned out to be not only a "fine" book, but the greatest of his seventeen novels. Steinbeck's agressive mixture of native philosophy, common-sense politics, blue-collar radicalism, working-class characters, folk wisdom, and home-spun literary form—all set to a bold, rhythmic style and nervy, raw dialogue—qualified the novel as the "American book" he had set out to write. The novel's title —from Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic"—was clearly in the American grain: "I like it because it is a march and this book is a kind of march—because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning," Steinbeck announced on September 10, 1938, to Elizabeth Otis, his literary agent.

After his arduous march of composition from late May through late October 1938("Never worked so hard in my life nor so long before," Steinbeck told Carl Wilhelmson), *The Grapes of Wrath* passed from his wife's typescript to published novel in a scant four months. In March 1939, when Steinbeck received copies from one of three advance printings, he

told Pascal Covici, his editor at The Viking Press, that he was "immensely pleased with them." The novel's impressive physical and aesthetic appearance was the result of its imposing length (619 pages) and Elmer Hader's striking dustjacket illustration (which pictured the exiled Joads looking out on a lush California valley). And true to Steinbeck's insistence that *The Grapes of Wrath* be "keyed into the American scene from the beginning," Covici had insured that Viking Press printed words and music from the "Battle Hymn" on the book's endpapers in an attempt (unsuccessfully, it turned out) to deflect accusations of communism against the novel.

Given the drastic plight of the migrant labor situation in California, Steinbeck refused to write a popular book or court commercial success. It was ironic, then, that shortly after its official publication date on April 14, 1939, fueled by the nearly ninety reviews—mostly positive—that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and literary journals between April and June, *The Grapes of Wrath* climbed to the top of the best-seller lists for most of the year, selling 428,900 copies in hardcover at $2. 75 each. (In 1941, when the Sun Dial Press issued a cloth reprint for a dollar, the publisher announced that more than 543,000 copies of *Grapes* had already been sold.) *The Grapes of Wrath* won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize (Steinbeck gave the $ 1000 prize to writer Ritch Lovejoy), eventually became the cornerstone of his 1962 Nobel Prize award, and proved itself to be among the most enduring works of fiction by any American author, past or present. In spite of the flaws its critics perceive (frequent sentimentality, flat characterizations, heavy-handed symbolism, unconvincing dialogue)—or perhaps because of them (general readers tend to embrace the book's mystic soul and are less troubled by its imperfect body)—*The Grapes of Wrath* has resolutely entered both the American consciousness and its conscience. If a literary classic can be defined as a book that speaks directly to readers' concerns in successive historical eras, then surely *The Grapes of Wrath* is such a work.

Although Steinbeck could not have predicted this success (and was nearly ruined by the notoriety it achieved), the fact is that, in the past half century, *The Grapes of Wrath* has sold more than 14 million copies. Many of them end up in the hands of students at schools and colleges where

the novel is taught in literature and history classes at every level from junior high to doctoral seminars. The book has also had a charmed life on screen and stage. Steinbeck sold the novel's film rights for $75,000 to producer Darryl F. Zanuck. Then Nunnally Johnson scripted a truncated film version, which was nonetheless memorably paced, photographed, and acted (especially by Henry Fonda as Tom Joad, Jane Darwell as Ma, and John Carradine as Jim Casy) under the direction of John Ford in 1940. (A "hard, straight picture… that looks and feels like a documentary film and… has a hard, truthful ring," Steinbeck reported after seeing its Hollywood preview.) Recently, Frank Galati faithfully adapted the novel for his Chicago-based Steppenwolf Company, whose Broadway production won a Tony Award as Best Play in 1990. *The Grapes of Wrath* has also been translated into nearly thirty languages. It seems that Steinbeck's words continue, in Warren French's apt phrase, "the education of the heart."

Every strong novel redefines our conception of the genre's dimensions and reorders our awareness of its possibilities. Like other products of rough-hewn American genius—Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (three other "flawed" novels that also humanize America's downtrodden by exposing social ills)—*The Grapes of Wrath* has a home-grown quality: part naturalistic epic, part jeremiad, part captivity narrative, part road novel, part transcendental gospel.

Many American authors, often with little in the way of a shared novelistic tradition to emulate, or finding that established fictional models don't suit their sensibilities, manage to forge their own way by synthesizing their personal vision and experience with a variety of cultural forms and literary styles. Steinbeck was no exception. To execute *The Grapes of Wrath* he drew on the jump-cut technique of John Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy (1937), the narrative tempo of Pare Lorentz's radio drama *Ecce Homo!* and the sequential quality of such Lorentz films as *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937), the stark visual effects of Dorothea Lange's photographs of Dust Bowl Oklahoma and California migrant life, the timbre of the Greek epics, the rhythms of the King James Bible, the refrains of American folk music, and the biological impetus of his and Edward F. Ricketts's ecological phalanx, or group-man, theory.

Steinbeck's imagination transformed these resources (especially biblical themes, parallels, analogies, and allusions) into his own holistic structure, his own individual signature. Malcolm Cowley's claim that a "whole literature is summarized in this book and much of it is carried to a new level of excellence" is especially accurate.

In early July 1938, Steinbeck told literary critic Harry T. Moore that he was improvising what was for him a "new method" of fictional technique: one which combined a suitably elastic form and elevated style to express the far-reaching tragedy of the migrant drama. In *The Grapes of Wrath* he devised a contrapuntal structure, which alternates short lyrical chapters of exposition and background pertinent to the migrants as a group (Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29) with the long narrative chapters of the Joad family's dramatic exodus to California (Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30). Just as in *Moby-Dick* Melville created intensity and prolonged suspense by alternating between the temporal chapters of Ahab's driven quest for the white whale and Ishmael's numinous chapters on cetology, so Steinbeck structured his novel by juxtaposition. His "particular" chapters are the slow-paced and lengthy narrative chapters that embody traditional characterization and advance the dramatic plot, while his jazzy, rapid-fire "interchapters" work at another level of recognition by expressing an atemporal, universal, synoptic view of the migrant condition. As he wrote Chapters 5 and 6, for instance, Steinbeck reminded himself that for maximum effect, "I want the reader to be able to keep [the general and particular chapters] separate in his mind." In fact, his "general" or intercalary chapters ("pace changers," Steinbeck called them) were expressly designed to "hit the reader below the belt. With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader—open him up and while he is open introduce things on a [sic] intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up," Steinbeck revealed to Columbia undergraduate Herbert Sturz in 1953.

The Grapes of Wrath is an engaged novel with a partisan posture, many complex voices, and passionate prose styles. ("No other American novel has succeeded in forging and making instrumental so many prose styles," Peter Lisca believes.) Except for its unflinching treatment of the Great Depression's climatic, social, and economic conditions, and those

interchapters that serve to halt the emotional slide toward sentimentality, there is nothing cynically distanced about it, nothing coolly modernist, in the way we have come to understand the elite literary implications of that term in the past seventy-five years. (*The Grapes of Wrath* is in some ways an old-fashioned novel, even down to its curious avoidance of human sexuality.) It is not narrated from the first-person point of view, yet the language has a consistently catchy eyewitness quality about it, and its vivid biblical, empirical, poetical, cinematic, and folk styles demonstrate the remarkable tonal and visual acuity of Steinbeck's ear and eye.

Steinbeck told Merle Armitage on February 17, 1939, that in "composition, in movement, in tone and in scope," *The Grapes of Wrath* was "symphonic." Indeed, his fusion of intimate narrative and panoramic editorial chapters enforces this dialogic concert. Chapters, styles, voices all speak to each other, set up resonances, send echoes back and forth—point and counterpoint, strophe and antistrophe—as in a huge symphony whose total impression far surpasses the sum of its discrete and sometimes dissonant parts. Steinbeck's novel belongs to that vital class of fictions whose shape issues not from an ideal blueprint of aesthetic propriety but from the generative urgency of its author's experience. ("It *had* to be written," Stanley Kunitz said in 1939.) Steinbeck's direct involvement with the plight of America's Dust Bowl migrants in the latter half of the 1930s created his obsessive urge to tell their story honestly but also movingly. "This must be a good book," he wrote in *Working Days* on June 10, 1938. "It simply must. I haven't any choice. It must be far and away the best thing I have ever attempted—slow but sure, piling detail on detail until a picture and an experience emerge. Until the whole throbbing thing emerges."

Making his audience see and feel that living picture was paramount. "I am not writing a satisfying story," he claimed to Pascal Covici on January 16, 1939:

> I've done my damndest to rip a reader's nerves to rags, I don't want him satisfied.… I tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written…. Throughout I've tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness. There are five layers in this book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won't find more than he has in himself.

Steinbeck's participatory aesthetic was based on a circle of complicity that linked "the trinity" of writer, text, and reader to ensure maximum affective impact. On June 7, 1938, as he completed Chapter 5, for instance, he kept his eye steadily on target: "Today's work is the overtone of the tractors, the men who run them, the men they displace, the sound of them, the smell of them. I've got to get this over. Got to because this one's tone is very important—this is the eviction sound and the tonal reason for movement. Must do it well."

Steinbeck conceived his novel on simultaneous levels of existence, ranging from socio-economic determinism to transcendent spirituality. Louis Owens explains how, for example, biblical parallels in *The Grapes of Wrath* illuminate four of Steinbeck's layers:

> On one level it is the story of a family's struggle for survival in the Promised Land…. On another level it is the story of a people's struggle, the migrants'. On a third level it is the story of a nation, America. On still another level, through… the allusions to Christ and those to the Israelites and Exodus, it becomes the story of mankind's quest for profound comprehension of his commitment to his fellow man and to the earth he inhabits.

Thus Steinbeck pushed back the accepted boundaries of traditional mimetic fiction and redefined the proletarian form. Like all truly significant American novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* does not offer codified solutions. Even though it treats with privilege a particular section of the migrant labor scene (Steinbeck ignores the problems of nonwhite migrant workers—Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans—who made up a significant percentage of California's agricultural labor force, according to Carey McWilliams), his book still speaks to the universal experience of human disenfranchisement, still holds out hope for human advancement. At every level *The Grapes of Wrath* enacts the process of its author's belief and embodies the shape of his faith, as in this ringing synthesis from Chapter 14.

> The last clear definite function of man—muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need—this is man. To build a wall, to build a house, a dam, and in the wall and house and dam to put something of Manself, and to Manself take back something of the wall, the house, the dam; to take hard muscles from the lifting, to take the clear lines and form from conceiving. For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments.

Behind this most public of American novels stands a reclusive writer. John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902, to respectable middle-class parents: John Ernst Steinbeck, Monterey County treasurer, and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, a former schoolteacher. Steinbeck attended Salinas High School, where he was an undistinguished student, then enrolled sporadically at Stanford University from 1919 to 1925. There, as an English-journalism major, he took a short-story writing class from Edith Mirrielees and was published in Stanford's undergraduate literary magazine, but he never finished his degree. He held a variety of temporary jobs during the next four years (laborer and cub reporter in New York City, resort handyman and watchman in Lake Tahoe), eventually publishing his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, in 1929. The novel scarcely sold, but Steinbeck's choice of vocation was sealed. He never again held a traditional nine-to-five job. Beginning in 1930, with the support and encouragement of his parents and especially of his wife, Carol Henning Steinbeck, whom he had married that year, writing became Steinbeck's daily occupation and continued so through lean and flush times for the remainder of his life. When Steinbeck died on December 20, 1968, he had managed to support himself and his families (he was married three times and had two sons and one stepdaughter) exclusively on his writing income, primarily from the thirty books of fiction, drama, filmscripts, and nonfictional prose he published between 1929 and 1966.

Cup of Gold, a swashbuckling historical romance based on the life of seventeenth-century Welsh buccaneer Henry Morgan, gave no indication that Steinbeck would eventually be capable of producing a graphic novel with the startling originality, magnitude, compassion, and power of *The Grapes of Wrath*. What transpired in those ten years is as arresting an example of determined, self-willed artistic growth as we have in American letters, for in the nine volumes of prose (mostly fiction) he produced in the 1930s, Steinbeck simply got stronger and stronger as a novelist. His achievement is especially moving because he rarely thought of himself as a natural genius and rarely believed he had ever "arrived" as a writer. This typical self-assessment is recorded in *Working Days* (Steinbeck's journal is the hermetic story behind the making of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the

writer's private text behind the reader's public one): "I was not made for success. I find myself with a growing reputation. In many ways it is a terrible thing.… Among other things I feel that I have put something over. That this little success of mine is cheating."

Steinbeck augmented his talent with plain hard work and repeated practice. Where his characters use tools to elevate work to a dignified level, Steinbeck turned to his "comfortable and comforting" pen, an instrument that became an "extension" of the best part of himself: "Work is the only good thing," he claimed on July 6, 1938, in *Working Days*. For Steinbeck, writing was a kind of textual habitation. He wrote books methodically the way other people built houses—word by word, sentence by sentence. His act of writing was a way of fulfilling his dream of finding a home in the architectural spaces created by his imagination. In fact, this creative and interior level of engagement is the elusive, unacknowledged fifth layer of Steinbeck's novel. Although Steinbeck insisted on effacing his own presence in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the fact remains that it is a very personal book, rooted in his own compulsion. The "plodding" pace of Steinbeck's writing schedule informed the slow, "crawling" movement of the Joads' journey, while the harried beat of his own life gave the proper "feel" and tone to his beleaguered characters. Their unsavory weaknesses and vanities, their struggles for survival, their unsuspecting heroism are Steinbeck's as well. If *The Grapes of Wrath* praises the honorableness of labor and ratifies the obsessive quest for a home, it is because the author himself felt these twin acts called into being the most committed, the most empathetic, the most resourceful qualities of the human psyche.

By nature Steinbeck was not a collaborator. "Unless a writer is capable of solitude he should leave books alone and go into the theatre," he exclaimed years later. Solitude was an increasingly precious commodity in Steinbeck's life because intrusions conspired to paralyze his will and disrupt his concentration. "Every book seems the struggle of a whole life," he lamented in *Working Days*. A grass-growing mood was rarely his, so he managed as best he could within his constraints. Although it didn't always ensure complete solitude, Steinbeck often sequestered himself in the eight-by-eight-foot work room of Arroya del Ajo (Garlic Gulch), the house he and Carol built in 1936 on Greenwood Lane in Los Gatos: "Just big enough for

a bed and a desk and a gun rack and a little book case. I like to sleep in the room I work in," he told George Albee.

The Grapes of Wrath's communal vision began in the fire of Steinbeck's own labor, but the flames were fanned by numerous people, especially Carol Steinbeck and Tom Collins. Carol Steinbeck (1906–1983), his outgoing first wife, was far more politically radical than John, and she actively supported northern California's local fugitive agricultural labor movement before he did. (According to his biographer, Jackson J. Benson, Steinbeck was not much interested in doctrinaire political theories at this point in his career.) Carol was an energetic, talented person in her own right, who agreed to relinquish a possible career in favor of helping to manage his. Their partnership and marriage was smoother and more egalitarian in the struggling years of Steinbeck's career; with the enormous success—and pressures—brought first by *Of Mice and Men* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1937), and then by *The Grapes of Wrath*, their situation became more tenuous and volatile. Carol was an extremely strong-willed, demonstrative person, and she was often frustrated, resentful, and sometimes jealous; John, inordinately shy, was frequently beleaguered, confused, and demanding. In the late 1930s, whenever John was writing daily, which was much of the time, Carol handled—but didn't always like—most of the routine domestic duties. She also shielded her husband as much as possible from unwarranted disruptions and intrusions, and she oversaw some of the financial arrangements (an increasingly large job) between Stein-beck and his literary agents. "Carol does so much," Steinbeck admitted on August 2, 1938.

Carol also served as his cultural envoy and stand-in. In January 1938, on a trip to New York City, she met with documentary film-maker Pare Lorentz (1905–1992), arranging between them his first visit to Los Gatos to discuss a joint Steinbeck-Lorentz movie version of *In Dubious Battle* (which was never made) and a private showing of *The River* and *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. These pioneering documentary films, which Lorentz made for President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal-inspired Resettlement Administration (fore-runner of the Farm Security Administration), dealt with human displacement and natural erosion caused by the Dust Bowl and Mississippi Valley floods. After their initial meeting,

Lorentz became an increasingly important figure in the novelist's life, providing everything from practical advice on politics to spirited artistic cheerleading.

Carol left her stamp on *The Grapes of Wrath* in many ways. She typed the manuscript, editing the text as she went along, and she served in the early stages as a rigorous critical commentator (after typing three hundred pages, she confessed to Elizabeth Otis that she had lost "all sense of proportion" and felt unfit "to judge it at all"). In a brilliant stroke, on September 2, Carol chose the novel's title from Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," perhaps inspired by her hearing of Pare Lorentz's radio drama, *Ecce Homo!*, which ends with a martial version of Howe's song. Steinbeck was impressed with "the looks of it—marvelous title. The book has being at last"; he considered it "Carol's best title so far." ("Tell Carol she is a whiz at picking titles and she has done it again with the new one," his drama agent, Annie Laurie Williams, exulted.) Her role as facilitator is recorded permanently in one half of the novel's dedication: "To CAROL who willed it." On February 23, 1939, Steinbeck told Pascal Covici that he had given Carol the holograph manuscript of *The Grapes of Wrath:* "You see I feel that this is Carol's book."

Eventually, however, Steinbeck's heart changed its tune. Carol's brittle efficiency, managerial brusqueness, and violent mood swings seemed to cause more problems than they solved. She, too, was exhausted by the novel's completion and at her wit's end over its histrionic reception: "The telephone never stops ringing, telegrams all the time, fifty to seventy-five letters a day all wanting something. People who won't take no for an answer sending books to be signed…. Something has to be worked out or I am finished writing. I went south to work and I came back to find Carol just about hysterical. She had been pushed beyond endurance," Steinbeck told Elizabeth Otis on June 22, 1939. His involvement with a much younger woman, a Hollywood singer named Gwyndolyn Conger, whom he met in mid- 1939 and who quickly came to represent everything Steinbeck felt romantically lacking in Carol, signaled the beginning of the end of their marriage. They separated rancorously in 1941 and divorced two years later.

The second part of the novel's dedication—"To TOM who lived it"—refers to Thomas Collins (1897?–1961), the novelist's chief source, guide,

discussant, and chronicler of accurate migrant information. Collins not only put Steinbeck in touch with the real-life prototypes of the Joads and Jim Casy, but he himself served as Steinbeck's real-life prototype for Jim Rawley, the fictional manager of the Weedpatch government camp. That camp, an accurate rendering of Collins's Arvin camp, became an oasis of relief for the harried Joads and is featured in Chapters 22 to 26 of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck portrayed Collins with photographic accuracy in Chapter 22: "A little man dressed all in white stood behind [Ma Joad]—a man with a thin, brown, lined face and merry eyes. He was as lean as a picket. His white clean clothes were frayed at the seams." Steinbeck also caught Collins's effective interpersonal technique in having Jim Rawley wear frayed clothes and win over Ma Joad by the simple request of asking for a cup of her coffee.

An intrepid, resourceful, and exceptionally compassionate man, Collins was the manager of a model Farm Security Administration camp, located in Kern County at the southern end of California's Central Valley. The Arvin Sanitary Camp was one of several proposed demonstration camps intended to provide humane, clean, democratic—but temporary—living conditions for the growing army of migrant workers entering California from the lower Middle West and Dust Bowl region. (More than two dozen camps were planned in 1935 by the Resettlement Administration; by 1940, with New Deal budgets slashed by conservatives in Congress, only fifteen were actually completed or under construction.) Collins possessed a genius for camp administration. Labor historian Anne Loftis calls Collins a "hands on" administrator; he had the right mix of fanaticism, vision, and tactfulness. He and Steinbeck, both Rooseveltian Democrats, hit it off immediately in the late summer of 1936, when the novelist went south on the first of several grueling research trips with Collins during the next two years to investigate field conditions. (One of the many legends that grew up around *The Grapes of Wrath* purported that Steinbeck traveled with a migrant family all the way from Oklahoma to California; that never happened, though he and Carol did follow Route 66 home on a car trip from Chicago to Los Gatos in 1937.)

Fortunately, Collins was a punctual and voluminous report writer (a plan to publish his reports eventually fell through). His lively weekly accounts of

the workers' activities, events, diets, entertainments, sayings, beliefs, and observations provided Steinbeck with a ready documentary supplement to his own research. In a section called "Bits of Migrant Wisdom," noted in Collins's "Kern Migratory Labor Camp Report for week ending May 2, 1936," he records a discussion with two women about how best to cut down on the use of toilet paper: "One suggested sprinkling red pepper through the roll. The other suggested a wire be attached to the roll so that every time a sheet was torn off the big bell placed on the outside of the building for the purpose would ring and let everyone know who was in the sanitary unit and what she was doing." Steinbeck saw the humor in the account and utilized some of the original material in Chapter 22: "'Hardly put a roll out 'fore it's gone. Come right up in meetin'. One lady says we oughta have a little bell that rings ever' time the roll turns oncet. Then we could count how many ever'body takes.' She shook her head. 'I jes' don' know,' she said. 'I been worried all week. Somebody's a-stealin' toilet paper from Unit Four.'" Collins guided Steinbeck through the intricacies of the agricultural labor scene, put him in direct contact with migrant families, and permitted Steinbeck to incorporate "great gobs" of information into his own writing. "Letter from Tom…. He is so good. I need this stuff. It is exact and just the thing that will be used against me if I am wrong," Steinbeck noted in *Working Days* on June 24, 1938.

In 1939, at Steinbeck's suggestion, Collins worked as a well-paid technical advisor to John Ford's Twentieth Century-Fox production of *The Grapes of Wrath*.("Tom will howl his head off if they get out of hand," Steinbeck told Elizabeth Otis.) And later—probably spurred by the success of both novel and film—Collins himself (under the pseudonym of Windsor Drake) wrote an autobiographical-fictional memoir, to which Steinbeck, who appears as a character, added a foreword: "Windsor and I traveled together, sat in the ditches with the migrant workers, lived and ate with them. We heard a thousand miseries and a thousand jokes. We ate fried dough and sow belly, worked with the sick and the hungry, listened to complaints and little triumphs." The book was accepted but never reached print because the publisher reneged on the deal. After that, Collins resigned from the F.S.A., and he and Steinbeck passed out of each other's lives.

Clearly, Steinbeck had a knack for associating himself with gifted, generous people. George West, chief editorial writer for the progressive San Francisco *News*, was the man who instigated Steinbeck's initial investigations of the migrant labor situation for his paper (to be discussed below). Frederick R. Soule, the enlightened regional information advisor at the San Francisco office of the Farm Security Administration, and his assistant, Helen Horn, provided statistics and documents for his *News* reports and otherwise opened official doors for Steinbeck that might have stayed closed. Soule's colleague Eric Thomsen, regional director in charge of management at the F.S.A. office in San Francisco, personally escorted Steinbeck to the Central Valley and introduced him to Tom Collins at the Arvin Camp for the first time. (Jackson J. Benson was the first to recognize that, in a convoluted and unintentional way, the federal government underwrote Steinbeck's research.) A continent away, in Manhattan, Steinbeck's publisher, the intrepid and irrepressible Pascal Covici (1888–1964), kept up a running dialogue with the novelist. In his literary agents he was triply blessed. Mavis McIntosh, Elizabeth Otis, and Annie Laurie Williams not only kept his professional interests uppermost at all times but did so with the kind of selflessness that made them more like family members than business managers. Of the three women, Elizabeth Otis (1901–1981) became his most trusted confidante.

III

Steinbeck lived to write. He believed it was redemptive work, a transformative act. Each day, after warming up with a letter to Otis or Covici and an entry in *Working Days*, he created a disciplined working rhythm and maintained what he called a "unity feeling"—a sense of continuity and habitation with his material. "Let the damn book go three hundred thousand words if it wants to. This is my life. Why should I want to finish my own life? The confidence is on me again. I can feel it. It's stopping work that does the damage," he admitted in *Working Days* on July 7, 1938. Ideally, for a few hours each day, the world Steinbeck created took precedence over the one in which he lived. Because both worlds can be considered "real," at times during 1938 Steinbeck didn't know where