

ADJUSTMENT OF INDIVIDUALS  
INTO SOCIETY IN JOHN STEINBECK'S  
*CANNERY ROW, OF MICE AND MEN,  
THE PASTURES OF HEAVEN,  
AND TORTILLA FLAT*

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John Steinbeck created figures characterized by a low level of intelligence and low morality out of deep social concern, which is often misinterpreted as his preference for describing primitives, idiots or deviants. Those characters are used by Steinbeck to reveal essential socio-psychological aspects of human life, as such social relations may not be so vivid in more sophisticated personalities depicted by Steinbeck in his other novels. Although most Steinbeck's novels deal with socio-psychological issues, the four novels *The Pastures of Heaven*, *Cannery Row*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Tortilla Flat* present relations of individuals to society in a most impressive way. Despite the fact that Steinbeck's works do not list all theoretical ways of adjustment, the characters in the four novels offer a rich material for a socio-psychological analysis.

The plots of above mentioned fiction by John Steinbeck offer a detailed picture of different social groups.<sup>1</sup> The characters in all the four novels exemplify various adaptive human reactions to environment and society. Most of them show

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<sup>1</sup> Usually the four novels are analyzed separately with too little attention paid to socio-psychological problems. Literary critics frequently mention animality and/or deviation of Steinbeck's characters, loss of individuality. Only a few, however, analyze the spiritual relation between place and people depicted by Steinbeck in his fiction.

a highly developed sense of *adjustment*,<sup>2</sup> understood as a social and psychological relationship that any living organism establishes with respect to its environment. This term implies that a person is involved in an ongoing process of developing his/her potential way of reacting to the environment in a way that harms neither him nor the environment. In this way an individual tries to find a state of complete equilibrium between his/her personal needs, desires and his/her social environment. In some cases adjustment may gain negative connotations due to a semantic overlap with *conformity*, which suggests that an adjusting person has given up personal initiative. Generally, *conformity* (as further analyzed on the example of the characters of *Tortilla Flat*, *Pastures of Heaven*, *Cannery Row*, *Of Mice and Men*) is a tendency to allow characters' opinions, attitudes and even perceptions to be affected by group's prevailing opinions, attitudes and actions. Significantly, there are at least two distinct patterns of the term's usage: *behavioral* and *attitudinal conformity*. These terms will be discussed and exemplified further in this paper in relation to *normative* and *informative social influence*.

Many characters show a change of behavior caused by real or imaginary influence of other people. This is called *public conformism*, or in other words adjustment to others' actions without much faith in what is actually said or done. Characters are said to anchor decisions on people belonging to the reference groups (e.g. those higher up on a social ladder «must» know better).<sup>3</sup> Here decision-making and attitude formation is dependent basically upon the external group's decisions and attitudes. When we are incapable of opinion making, we readily rely on opinions of others. This in turn is closely related to the term *private acceptance*, or adjustment to others' behavior without being convinced of the acceptability of one's actions. Our behavior then is influenced and/or even determined by the presence, behavior or actions of other members of the social group.

Another term taken from the field of social psychology, which may come in handy, is relatively widespread *uniformity*, which implies a condition in which there is an agreement concerning some belief, practice or a fact. As there are not very many ideas that all members of a given group uniformly believe in, this term can be relatively applied to cases of social interference into individual adjustment.

In the novels analyzed in this paper Steinbeck introduces four social groups. Paisanos and outcasts in *Tortilla Flat*, the middle class in *Cannery Row*, farmhands in *Of Mice and Men* are a case in point. Most members of these social classes want both to assimilate to society and to preserve their individuality. The society of *The Pastures of Heaven* is different in this respect as it is only united by the common maladaptive behavior to the environment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I have adopted this and all the following italicized terms from Arthur S. Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* or Elliot Aronson, et al. *Social Psychology. The Heart and the Mind*.

<sup>3</sup> So-called *social anchoring*.

<sup>4</sup> To explain the maladaptive behavior is a task beyond the scope of this study, but a few observations further in the text on the nature of the problem may help to cast light on other questions which are of primary concern.

People as individuals strive to preserve, sometimes being unaware of it, their uniqueness in everyday life. Generally speaking, individualism stresses freedom and the self-directed, self-contained, self-reliant ego. Alexis de Tocqueville described individualism in terms of a kind of moderate selfishness, which allowed people to be concerned only with their own small circle of family and friends.

All values in individualism are man-centered; the individual is of supreme value, society being only a means to individual ends. All individuals are in some sense morally equal. Individualism holds that an individual best develops when he is allowed maximum freedom and responsibility for choosing his objectives and the means for obtaining them. According to Jeremy Bentham, each person is the best judge of his own interests and can discover how to advance them. It is also based upon the assumption that the act of making these choices contributes to the development of the individual. Society, from this point of view, is seen as only a collection of individuals, each of which is a self-contained and ideally almost self-sufficient entity.

Social groups, on the other hand, form an organism of people who are classified together on the basis of social psychological factors. A notion *social group* implies interrelations or interdependence among group members. A group is based on interwork and interaction. The dynamics of a group depends on power shifts, leadership, group formation and cohesiveness. Everybody can be engaged in a group dynamics. And more significantly, almost everyone wants to be engaged in it.

And here we enter the domain of *normative social influence*. Human beings are social creatures by nature. By interaction with others they gain emotional comfort, pleasures of common experience and life in a community. Therefore, individuals conform so as to benefit from being a member of a group. Being deprived of relations with others may result in traumatic experience. Hence Steinbeck's characters adjust to larger groups.

Another reason, which seems to compel people to conform, is the fear of being pushed aside. They do not want to be deprived of bonds with a group. That is why they change to accept overt and covert *social rules*, which govern acceptable behavior, values and beliefs. A group has certain expectations connected with its members' behavior. If one does not fulfill them, one is no longer accepted in a group. Those who do not adapt to accepted norms are perceived as different, and often deviant.<sup>5</sup> These two conditions of *conformism*, i.e. the need to be accepted by a group and a desire to benefit from it, stem from *behavioral conformity*. These tendencies to go

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of social intrusion into individual adjustment raises many issues that fall outside the topic I have introduced. For theoretical perspective on the issue of deviation, norm, and conformity, see: Richard P. Youniss. *Conformity to Group Judgements in Relation to the Structure of the Stimulus Situation and Certain Personality Variables*, Dorothy Jean Mundy. *Conformity to Group Judgments in Relation to the Assumed Similarity of Members to Each Other* and John Richard Eiser. *Cognitive Social Psychology. A Guidebook to Theory and Research*.

along with the group and attempt to act in ways consistent with the majority's are fundamental behavior patterns in *normative social influence*.

The first aspect of the *normative social influence* is most vividly seen in the widespread acceptance of the world and people in *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*. The former presents a *horizontal group* of poor paisanos that inhabit a hilly district of Monterey. Acceptance of things as they are lies in the nature of paisanos, who possess almost a perfect apparatus for adjusting to the reality. What they value most is freedom, independence, and a strong bond with nature. Danny is the only character who is forced to give up his social and economical freedom by accepting his grandfather's inheritance. The rest of the paisanos preserve their freedom. The «weight of responsibility» and «the worry of property»<sup>6</sup> on Danny's face make him strikingly different from his friends. Pilon's attitude towards responsibility in the world of American economy is telling. Having rented one of Danny's houses Pilon states: «I'm getting into debt to him. . . . My freedom will be cut off. Soon I shall be a slave because of this Jew's house» (T.F. 22). Being a tenant, Pilon has to abandon his contemplative style of life, which characterizes all paisanos who live for the moment, drinking and contemplating the beauty of nature. It all results in their nonmaterialistic approach to life. They subordinate whatever materialistic drives they might have to their love of freedom, nature and living for the moment. As most of them are not corrupted by money, they can spend time observing nature.

Though paisanos are sometimes tempted by pride of ownership (Danny's two houses), respectability (Sweet Ramirez's vacuum cleaner), and money; yet most of them are strong enough to fight with these feelings and they finally resist them by means of friendship, which is of prime importance for them. The only exception is Danny who expiates his having become a slave of property. Those whom Danny has left behind at a party hear his last cry of defiance and «even now when [they] speak of Danny's opponent they lower their voices and look furtively about» (T.F. 212). Danny gets so drunk that he topples in stupor over a cliff to his death. Danny's «worthy opponent» is not his drinking. It is the middle-class respectability he cannot accept.

The inhabitants of *Tortilla Flat* do not have high expectations of life and are happy with what they have. Their attitude to reality is based on the avoidance of situations which they are unable to control. They do not force anything. They realize that happiness is more than material gain; it is the time spent together, the food and wine shared. They have learnt that it is better to accept life as it is than to impose anything on themselves. Their creed is best summarized by Pilon who says that: «Happiness is better than riches. . . . If we try to make Danny happy, it will be better thing than to give him money» (T.F. 102). They are not enslaved by money, because they look for happiness in simple things. They believe they are not obliged to a society in any way, however they readily accept the benefits of it, most likely because their social values are heavily dependent on their personal economic freedom.

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<sup>6</sup> John Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat*, 13, 17. The following references will be made to this edition and will be marked parenthetically in the text as (T.F.).

The characters in *Cannery Row* show similar acceptance and adjustment to life. The opinion about Mac and the boys gains even more significance as it is made by Doc, a local deity and a paragon of virtue:

I think that Mack and the boys know everything that has happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do whatever they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else.<sup>7</sup>

Like Tortilla Flat inhabitants, Mack and the boys seem to live for the moment. They can relax as they have no property to guard, no house to monitor against burglars, no work to do and no duties. They are hardly subject to financial worries that stem from possession. Steinbeck calls them «the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness . . . where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable around them» (C.R. 15). In the crazy world they remain truthful to their ideas because they follow the natural order of things.

In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, 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. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? (C.R. 15)

Here Steinbeck presents his disenchantment with commercially oriented American society, the society which forces things on people. Steinbeck seems to idealize and glorify Mack and the boys for their peaceful acceptance of life. They do not fight with life, they avoid whatever is beyond their control. They avoid the trap of materialism and commercialism. In this manner they lead a healthy life; «Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blot-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums.» (C.R. 15) The so called respectable citizens of Cannery Row despise these primitive and irresponsible bums. Undeniably, paisanos «are, by comparison with the dominant society on whose affluent fringes they have a quite comfortable marginal existence, relatively primitive» (Alexander 137). Yet, it is eventually these bums who triumph

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<sup>7</sup> John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*, 141-142. The following references will be made to this edition and will be marked parenthetically in the text as (C.R.).

in a ruthlessly competitive and stressful world, and benefit from the situation where others have lost.

This ethical paradox shows that respectable citizens, who value materialism more than life in compliance with nature, are often less successful in adaptation to environment than Mac and the boys who are «outcasts form a social world which has arrogantly and wrongfully denied its connections with and dependence upon nature» (Alexander 139). In this respect inhabitants of Cannery Row are to some extent superior beings to others. Luckily for paisanos, they «have relinquished, not their humanity, but their participation in an impious and destructive way of life whose adherents call it civilization» (Alexander 139).

There is another similarity between Mac and the boys and Danny and his friends as far as the position of work in their lives is concerned. They do not need money to be happy, yet they know how to make it. The dialogue between Richard Frost and Doc illustrates it best: «They could ruin their lives and get money. Mac has qualities of genius. They're all very clever if they want something. They just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting» (C.R. 142). Exactly like paisanos, Mack and the boys comprehend the true nature of things and consequently by adjusting to it they can live independent lives. Because of their tolerance, understanding and acceptance, many inhabitants of Row find life to be as good as it gets. McCarthy depicts Cannery Row as a place where: «[a] man can sleep in a boiler in the vacant lot, run up a grocery bill at Lee Chong's, pay two dollars for a visit to Dora's, work a little for Doc or in a nearby cannery. Or he can do nothing» (102). This idleness and laziness, living for the moment, and the general poverty bring them closer. Thus it is easy for them to adjust to their own private *social norms* and their sense of belonging to a community is strengthened.

However among the middle class representatives of Cannery Row, there are also unconventional people like Dora and Lee Chong, who have received widespread social acceptance. Dora Flood runs a «decent, clean, honest, old fashioned sporting house» (C.R. 16). The middle class community accepts her unsanctioned business, they know it is just a cover for a brothel, in exchange for her hefty financial contributions to their society, thus «[b]eing illegal Dora must be especially philanthropic» (C.R. 17). It is mutual acceptance –she obeys the law more than she needs, and a decent community does not ostracize her as long as it can profit from her business. Lee Chong is another character that combines «financial respectability and compassion» (McCarthy 103). Although he may have lost money on long-term loans, he is generous in other aspects. He offers himself to others, yet not without benefits.

Another short novel, *Of Mice and Men*, presents a similar relation based on mutual acceptance, yet this time it is between two farmhands. George travels with Lennie because they were brought up together and therefore he feels responsible for his retarded friend. Notwithstanding his unfailing loyalty, Lennie offers George fulfillment of their dream. Theoretically, George could easily do without Lennie. However, since George accepted him as his partner, they both live for the dream of the land. Thus they together adjust to the circumstances. As Peter Lisca states:

«The dream of the farm originates with Lennie; and it is only through Lennie, who also makes it impossible, that the dream has any meaning for George» (Motif and Pattern 234). George believes he will not attain that dream without Lennie. They keep the dream alive for themselves, that is their way of adjustment. They live for the dream.

Doc in *Cannery Row* is another character who avoids the truth. However his adjustment is different in nature from George and Lennie's. Doc does not escape into dreams from the truth, in turn he escapes into lies to satisfy people he meets. Benson claims that Doc «abandons his [fundamental] honesty in the face of pressure from society» (137). Doc finds out that he cannot tell the truth to the people he meets on the trip in the countryside. Those whom he tells that he is walking for pleasure laugh at him. So he stops telling the truth. He does not want to be perceived as different; therefore he says he does it on a bet. People fail to comprehend his reasons as a walk for pleasure is a rarity in a hasty world of materialism. People only accept Doc when he rationalizes his actions in the way they expect it. This way others finally identify with his motives: «Everyone liked him then and believed him. They asked him in and gave him a bed and they put lunches up for him and wished him good luck and thought he was a hell of a fine fellow» (C.R. 104). Hence, Doc is forced to give up his honesty and conform to a *social norm*. It is a perfect case of *public conformism*, as he certainly will not stop loving honesty and truth.

Merging into habitat is yet another aspect of people's acceptance of the reality. Again it is best seen in two short novels: *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*. These people blend with their background with the purpose of leading an easier life. Frederick Bracher calls this ability «the most valuable biological attribute» (192). Paisanos are described in relation to locale, food and wine supplies, customs and habits. They almost ideally adjust to the climate and social situation. Mild climate does not require regular houses –a shelter is enough for them. Sea provides them with plenty of fish for nothing and closing restaurants with leftovers, ergo they readily accept the gifts of nature (Metzger 142).

The inhabitants of Tortilla Flat share at least a few more features with Mac and the boys. The most obvious one is the fact that they have no wish to be destroyed by the civilization which drives people to a nervous breakdown. They realize that lazy and unaffected lifestyle can only be reached by contact with nature. They escape into counterculture,<sup>8</sup> which came into being as a reaction to the self-destruction of the Western society (Great Depression). The counterculture can be seen best in «the rollicking independence of these paisanos, their poverty, their touching poetic enthusiasms [which] are calls of a sprit free from the drudging materialism of conventional American life» (Walcutt 260). They witness and give up all the symbols of destruction –money, power, and respectability. Instead, they come up with their own set of values which hold nature in high esteem.

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<sup>8</sup> Term used by Peter Lisca in «*Cannery Row: Escape into Counterculture*» in Benson, 111.

This problem of reversal of virtues is strictly connected with the aforementioned counterculture in the two societies of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. This reversal constitutes an important part of their adjustment to society. The novels show «celebration of values directly opposed to the capitalist ethic dominant in Western society» (Lisca, *Nature and Myth* 112). The criticism of modern values is not overt; as «the novel concealed its attack on modern American values in what appeared to be an insubstantial confection» (Alexander 135). In the environment of Cannery Row kindness, openness, generosity and truthfulness may lead to failure whereas such vices as greed, meanness and self-interest, in this society become the cornerstone of success. For Cannery Row inhabitants virtues and vices trade places. As Doc says:

«the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And these traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self interest are the traits of success.» (C.R. 143)

People instinctively love virtues, but opportunistically follow vices. As Steinbeck expresses it: «while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second» (C.R. 143). Steinbeck already voiced this opinion a few years earlier in *Sea of Cortez*, saying: «of the good we think always of wisdom, tolerance, kindness, generosity, humility; and the qualities of cruelty, . . . graspingness and rapacity are universally considered undesirable» (quoted in Lisca, *Escape and Commitment* 85). In the light of this interpretation all the inhabitants of Cannery Row may be regarded as «whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches» and as «saints and angels and martyrs and holy men» (C.R. 1) at the same time. John Chamberlain defines this paradox saying that: «In Steinbeck's world whores are interchangeable with angels, and pimps with saints.»<sup>9</sup> It depends on the «peephole» we look through. If we adopt a biological viewpoint, Mac, the boys and the others live according to nature by not trying to fight the order of the world. They accept readily what comes to them. That is their more or less successful way of adjusting to the circumstances. Still, undertaking social and economical standpoint, Mac and the boys cannot escape the American civilization with its values and judgments. In chapter 23, Richard Frost judges Mac and the boys in relation to the values of capitalist ethic which is dominant in Western society.

Seen from another perspective paisanos from Tortilla Flat may be perceived as parasites. A standard American middle class citizen could say that paisanos' lives are devoid of sense. Their extreme oneness with nature does not offer a reasonable alternative to society's problems. Though, the inhabitants of Tortilla Flat are not thoughtless animals, as some critics have labeled them, because they develop their

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in John Kennedy, 126.



own code of morals. One of the elements of paisanos' morality is their triumphant adjustment to the environment seen in survival. Ironic as it may sound, a man frequently survives, but does not succeed. Most likely paisanos survive as they expect a lot from society and they themselves only pursue simple pleasures. However, in the long run they do not succeed as they do not sacrifice anything they treasure in the name of the society's welfare. The inhabitants of Tortilla Flat just take what they want and give nothing in exchange. A critical person may see them as ignorant and egocentric bums. On the one hand, it is true paisanos «harmonize with the flow, rhythm» (Hughes 123) of nature, yet still they are indolent, lazy «bums» who think mostly about satisfying their appetites. Paisanos give up property, drink a lot and avoid work. They readily use money especially when they do not have to earn it. The inhabitants of Tortilla Flat do not perceive helping others and contributing to society's welfare as essential. Apparently they do not think it is their duty. One might even say that they adjust too well to the detriment of others who are less adaptive. They may even be called «parasites» in the sense that they try to benefit from every possible situation.

Lee Chong adopts a system of human values devoid of all the parasitic qualities (greed, haste, materialism) responsible for the Great Depression. Behind both Mac's subculture and Lee Chong's Taoism lies the need to cultivate simple, physical enjoyments and the inner life. Both reject materialism, and other notions of Western success –power, fame and violence. However, there is a significant difference between Mac's reversal of values and Lee Chong's Taoism. Mac and the boys live in tune with Nature; at the same time they reject symbols of civilization. They know the nature of things too well to be caught in the self-destructive wanting. They go even further. They benefit from the goods of civilization without contributing to it in return. They are trying to replace the craziness of the world with their own values.

Although Mac and the boys seem to adjust well, their proposed system of human values is relative and controversial. And this is what makes Mac's and Lee's adjustments different. Lee Chong seems to be patterned after the sixth century's Chinese philosopher Lao-tse: «Lee Chong is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good –an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze» (C.R. 14). The wisdom of Taoism teaches him the strength of weakness and the success in failure. Peter Lisca notes: «To be obscure is to be wise; to fail is to succeed; in human relationships force always defeats itself; even laws are a form of violence; the moral life is one of inaction.» (*Nature and Myth* 118) Lee tries to find good aspects in thankless tasks; he does not force anything and lets things happen. When he lets Mac and the boys «rent» the Palace Flophouse for nothing, he is not in a lost position. At once he realizes that his new tenants will guard his property. Moreover, they will be honest with Lee as it is not honorable to do harm to your upholder: «one further bond is established– you cannot steal from your benefactor» (C.R. 12). Mac's pride does not let him shop in another grocery; therefore he and his friends will be regular customers in Lee's store. This example shows that Lee proves to adjust to the environment. In adverse circumstances he

follows the traditional Chinese prescription for a happy life: «There is no greater curse than lack of contentment. No greater sin than the desire for possession. Therefore he who is contented with contentment shall always be content.»<sup>10</sup> He accepts and is content with what life brings him. And here the two attitudes, Mac's and Lee's, blur in one.

Doc is another character who shows Taoist attitude. Peter Lisca claims that «Doc himself clearly embodies the traits of a Taoist sage.» (Escape into the Counterculture 117) His Taoist attitude helps him to adjust to the society. He does not desire to gain material goods, he does not look for power, money and fame either. He is a simple man who wants to be in harmony with everybody. To be a better man, he studies nature. He is looking for oneness with nature but also with all the members of the society he lives in. He respects «otherness». He does not despise the whorehouse, nor does he abuse the simplicity of Lee Chong. He creates equilibrium of his personal inner life and the society. This seems to be the key to his successful adjustment.

All the misfortunes in Canary Row result from abandoning the standards of Taoism. These hardships can be labeled «American civilization.» People bring them upon themselves by pandering blindly to greed, meanness, and egotism (Henri), self-interest, acquisitiveness and forced respectability (Mrs. Mallory). These characters are incapable of a healthy adjustment to the society, as they do not accept life as it is. Apart from parasitic relations between people and their society, there exists another recognizable type of adjustment to society – a commensal relation (Hughes 124).

Commensal relations seem healthy and mutually beneficial. Mac and the boys, quite contrary to the paisanos, develop interdependent relations with their group. The group collects cats and frogs for money; one of them works as a bartender. The relationships really tie the characters together, since «Steinbeck seems to take great care in showing how the interrelations are mutually beneficial» (Benton 135). Even the apparent parasitic incident of acquiring The Palace Flophouse from Lee turns into commensal dependence. Mac and the boys gain shelter and Lee is glad that no «mysterious» injury will be made to his property.

Everyone was happy about it. And if it be thought that Lee Chong suffered a total loss, at least his mind did not work that way. The windows were not broken. Fire did not break out, and while no rent was ever paid, if the tenants ever had any money, and quite often they did have, it never occurred to them to spend it any place except at Lee Chong's grocery. (C.R. 11-12)

This commensal relation, between Lee and Mack and the boys living together without much harm done to each other, is influenced by Lee's Taoist philosophy.

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<sup>10</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of China and India*, cited in Peter Lisca, «*Cannery Row: Escape into the Counterculture*» 116.

Lee manages to preserve his Taoist attitude and to strive for material gain. By his ambivalent attitude to human beings, Lee remains successful in business but not at the expense of others. This grocer is a realistic businessman. It is visible in his attitude to his clients: «He never pressed his clients, but when the bill became too large, Lee cut off credit» (C.R. 5). He is also soft and nice when a situation demands it; he is «a hard man with a can of beans –a soft man with the bones of his grandfather» (C.R. 14). He is materialistic because his job requires this trait of character, however Lee sees beyond immediate prosperity. This makes him fit into the web of life. His grocery is a mysterious human-friendly institution as Lee is not a regular, money-oriented grocer. He runs his business to his apparent financial disadvantage in the short run, but in this way he gains steady customers.

Dora also belongs to the inhabitants of Cannery Row who form commensal relationships. Similarly to Lee, she gets compensation for her actions. She is a good manager of her «sturdy, virtuous club» (C.R. 16). Miss Flood is disciplined and as such she demands from her girls «clean-cut, efficient and simple» relations with their clients. This way her business does not disrupt the family lives of her clients. Dora is realistic; therefore she knows that with the illegal business she is running, she has to abide the law more than anybody else in their community. The matrons from Monterey cannot condemn Dora as she supports charities. Dora and Lee are the best examples of social adjustment of individual American business holders to the particular environment. This way they both form efficient commensal relationships, which define the social order.

Much has been said about morality codes in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, however it seems essential to name a few aspects constituting a notion of loyal community. Due to general «distrust in conventional [middle class] morality» (Walcott 259), their codes are set against it. It was noticed by Kinney that: «Steinbeck's morality is never fervent, it is relaxed and [even] comic» (43). Paisanos and Mack and the boys champion simple pleasures conditioned by an underlying pragmatism. Paisanos separate their morality from Christianity (following the teaching of the church, accepting church dogmas) and place it firmly in Nature, which helps them to develop their spiritual selves. This transcendentalist thinking goes along with the paisanos' belief in pursuing their own ways. Hence, their lifestyle was not forced upon them by anybody, they chose to embrace this unsophisticated cult of freedom. Inhabitants of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row set out for a spiritual journey inside themselves. Their different moral system sanctions romantic image of life style of conscious, simple individual (Metzger 143).

Apart from being strongly individualistic, paisanos form a closely-knit community. After many incidents, their attitude towards life changes. They realize that self-oriented approach is not the answer. It becomes obvious to them that an individualistic member of a group should move from isolationism to involvement. An individual may be torn between two conflicting attitudes. Shively claims that: «Individual is fraught with a multitude of aims and is therefore drawn toward numerous and varied approaches, urged by the driving need for some unifying principle in his

life.» (30) A paisano should change his approach from need of power and money to devotion and sacrifice. Circumstances necessitate their biding loyalty which in turn «gains its force from mutual respect and understanding» (Kinney 38). Therefore, inhabitants of Tortilla Flat have to form a loyal community and cooperate with it. Paisanos have to adjust to help others so that they will be helped later on. Their loyal community has best hopes for survival of the human species.

Human life balances communal and individual nature, as both of these elements are necessary for a total personality. Thus life in accordance with the rules of nature impels paisanos to strive for an achievement of an equilibrium between their individual and communal lives. In like manner, Doc and Lee Chong possess these two facets – individual and communal. Doc combines individualistic traits (his parties in Western Biological, devotion to science, aloofness) and he shows deep understanding for Dora and her girls, Mac and the boys and, above all, love for Frankie.

Opposed to this communal orientation of some characters there is self-love and misunderstanding that we see in *Cannery Row*. These traits set some of the characters in isolation against the prevailing way of life of the community. Mrs. Malloy needs respectability, watchman chases after people in chapter 14, Henri wallows in self-pleasure when building a boat, William is overwhelmed by self-accusations which lead to a suicide. All these non-communal actions lead to lack of happiness and satisfaction.

Some inhabitants of Tortilla Flat try to preserve their unity of friendship, yet, they often do not want to share with the group. Paisanos severely beat Big Joe who steals Pirate's treasure, as «the bag of money had become the symbolic center of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved» (T.F. 139). They respect Pirate's right to collect money for a candlestick for Saint Francis. Not only do they respect the little money they have, but they also value paisanos' property. They seem to combine two aspects of human character fighting for prominence: an individual and a group. They choose to be independent individuals yet they manage to show some signs of communal belonging. Because of these two entwined and conflicting aspects paisanos can be labeled truly human.

The world of choices between an individual and a group is tough not only for Tortilla Flat inhabitants. Characters retreat from this world to a safe place, which is yet another means of adjusting to reality. In *Of Mice and Men* Steinbeck depicted harsh journeys of two young men, whose great imaginations fueled their ambitions to fulfill their dreams of better lives. Lennie and George both dream of a place to call their own. They are struggling to understand their own unique places in the world. Escape into a real safe place serves as an adjustment to harsh reality. The little house and a couple of acres George and Lennie dream about is their mental asylum. George performs a verbal ritual telling a familiar story to Lennie, who says «go on –tell again, George.»<sup>11</sup> Each time Lennie Small lacks security, his comrade

<sup>11</sup> John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 62. All the following references will be made to this edition and will be marked parenthetically in the text as (OMM).

ritually reminds him of the future safe place. Lennie and George «aspire to a small piece of land that will make them part of a stable and secure society instead of its migratory fringes» (Steele 21). Thus their dream is not about money, as they have modest financial aspirations; Lennie and George need a place where they would belong, where «nobody gonna hurt nobody nor steal from 'em» (OMM 116). By craving for a piece of land they adjust to the demands of the society which makes possession of property a cornerstone of respect and security. Their dream is adapted to suit this *social norm*, thus it becomes their defense against merciless forces of the world.

There is yet another social influence that compels characters to adjust –*informative social influence*. Under this influence people alter their beliefs and attitudes not in fear of ostracism but as a result of verbal pressure from others. This change may or may not lead to behavioral changes such as abandoning traditions or society. There are two main factors that play an important part in *informative social influence*: a crisis or unclear situation in which a person is forced to make judgment and/or opinion, and a situation where others seem to be better experts than the person who is to form his own beliefs, opinions.

Words play an important role in the lives of Steinbeck's characters. They impose order on chaos but also cause a lot of confusion and misunderstanding if they are used untimely. Crisis situations, especially among characters in *The Pastures of Heaven*, are caused by a revelation of a gossip or true opinion which create peer pressure and make the person anchor his opinions on others.

Often a gossip, a mindless joke or a malicious remark change perception of the world. Bert Munroe is a case in point. It was not particularly wise of him, a newly settled inhabitant of the Pastures of Heaven, to tell Mrs. Hueneker that he «saw her old man running off with Maria Lopez,»<sup>12</sup> one of the sisters that ran a restaurant. Only after this unreasonably jealous wife began to question the morality of the Lopez sisters, did they begin to offend moral standards of the society. A mindless comment of an uninitiated newcomer stigmatizes the Lopez sisters as prostitutes. Rosa and Maria Lopez do not give themselves to men for money, they just give their favors to customers who eat and pay for three or more enchiladas and then pray to the Virgin and Santa Rosa. And thus by not accepting the money of shame, there is no reason why they should not think of themselves as honest women. As they do not sell themselves, only spice the cookings, they believe there is nothing immoral in their actions. Their conversation proves it: «Do not make a mistake. I did not take the money. The man had eaten three enchiladas – three!» (PoH 90). The sisters, unaware of the moral fallacy of the situation, are shocked to hear the sheriff come to close down their business. After all, by accepting the society's judgment on their immoral conduct, sisters have to give up their illusionary world and leave the society.

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<sup>12</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Pastures of Heaven*, 105. All the further references will be to this edition and will be marked parenthetically in the text as (PoH.).

When Junius Maltby, another member of The Pastures of Heaven, discovers the society's true attitude towards him, he reacts in a similar way to the Lopez sisters. Julius is unaware of the harm he did to his son, Robbie, till the moment his charitable, yet overcurious, neighbors give his son clothes. The family is suddenly made 'poor' through the charity of a society. He does not think about their idle life on the farm in society's terms. He also does not realize that neighbors see his life differently, neither of the concerned, Maltby nor the Lopez sisters, realized their true standing in the community (Fontenrose 20). Puzzled as he is, Julius admits his ignorance of society's opinion on him, and thus agrees he has violated the standards of the society and leaves the valley. The intrusive society «forced some to give up their established ways of life in the Pastures and to go elsewhere» (Fontenrose 14). The difference is that Maltby does not offend the social moral standards but their aesthetics. *Informative social influence* has such an impact on Junius that he changes his behavior from natural to artificial.

Banks is another character who initially views himself as normal. His oddity consists in his insensitivity and unashamed fondness of the sight of death. Banks sees nothing abnormal in it until the moment of conversation with his friend, Bert, who says: «if you had any imagination, I wouldn't have to tell you. If you had any imagination, you'd see for yourself, and you wouldn't go up to see some poor devil get killed» (PoH 133). Bert is clearly trying to convey the society's attitude towards watching executions of 'poor' criminals. On hearing this, Banks realizes the need for his embracing moral principles of the society in order not to be ostracized.

The discovery of society's opinion drastically influences yet another life. Being a watchman makes William a happy and confident member of the Canary Row society. When he overhears Mac and the boys referring to him as a pimp, he loses his confidence and his heart is broken. William is so uncertain of his social standing that he too readily anchors his opinions on others. He is too uneasy to realize the truth is often veiled and may even be distorted by words. William is not confident enough to see that dependence and therefore he cannot successfully cope with the change of his social status (from a watchman to a pimp) and hence commits suicide.

Such *attitudinal conformity* is also seen in situations of the acceptance of well-known standards or people setting these standards. Since Doc is one of them, his words are determinant of community's opinions. Doc exerts huge *informative social influence* on others. He knows the theory (the nature of things) and puts it into practice. Therefore, he is able to see things as they are. Moreover, everybody looks up to Doc and thus he «becomes the philosophical standard-bearer of this unusual ocean front community. As the book's most important character, Doc is also the measure of all others» (Hughes 130). He is the person of unquestionable merit for the rest of the community, therefore others respect him and adopt his opinions.

*Informative social influence* can still be better understood by the application of the *congruity theory*. This theory holds that a person's attitudes will not change when he feels the same toward both the source and the content of the message. This situation is present in Cannery Row where Lee feels positive about the source of the

message (when he is blackmailed) –he knows Mac and the boys, and at the same time he is positive about the content (threat). He deduces that there is no other solution to the problem (renting Palace Flophouse) than to save his face and benefit from the situation. His reasoning shows adjustment to the circumstances.

On the other hand, the *congruity theory* also makes it clear that if a person feels positive about the source of a message, but negative about the content or the other way round, he is motivated to change either his attitude toward the message or his opinion of the speaker. This case can be illustrated by two situations in Cannery Row. Doc abandons his habit of telling the truth motivated by «messages» heard from the people he talked to. Therefore he adjusts his habit to the circumstances. The other situation involves the girl selling beer in Cannery Row who changes her attitude towards Doc. Firstly, she does not believe Doc when he asks for a beer milkshake. The message is odd and unclear for her, as she has never heard of anything like this. On hearing that it is a doctor's prescription, the girl accepts Doc's unusual order.

The congruity theory can be applied in another case, though not because of the source of the message, about Lopez sisters and Junius Maltby from *The Pastures of Heaven*. Here it is not the source of the message that the characters oppose, but its content. Lopez sisters and Junius do not know their real standing in a society. After discovering the truth, they leave the valley. They accept the society's rightness to judge and/or condemn their behavior, yet simultaneously they do not accept the society's verdict, thus by rejecting the content of the message, they choose to move out and try to adapt themselves to the different social circumstances.

In *The Pastures of Heaven, Of Mice and Men, Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck presents various ways in which people can adapt to a society as human behavior is constantly modified by a very wide range of social influences. Following *normative social influence* Mac and the boys along with paisanos choose merging into habitat and forming their own moral codes or counterculture as means of *adjustment* to certain circumstances. Moreover, similarly to them, Dora in *Cannery Row* formed commensal relations with the rest of the society. For some others, Lee Chong and Doc in *Cannery Row*, adjustment corresponded to adopting transcendentalism or Taoism. All their actions lead to acceptance of social beliefs, traditions and expectations.

Another influence that impels *adjustment* is connected with *attitudinal conformism*, seen as anchoring characters' opinions on others. This *informative social influence* exists in crisis situations when an expert's opinion is needed. Peer pressure created by a revelation of society's true opinion of a character caused behavioral changes in this person's adaptation process. Thus the power of words influences and alters individual characters' lives. By succumbing to it they become accepted by a group.

The picture of social relations, furnished with socio-psychological theory presented in this paper, is only an exemplary illustration of possible analyses of John Steinbeck's short fiction. The character of interrelations between individuals and the society was studied in hope of presenting socio-psychological notions of adjustment. Discussing these problems, I attempted to provide the reader with a picture of potential

ways of reacting to the society. Steinbeck created his characters as a pretext to show deeper psychological problems such as ways of adaptation, adjustment disorders, in other words maladjustment, or incompatibility of social standards and adjustment of insane and deviant characters.

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