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MacKenzie, John (2021) *"Nature's social union": Robert Burns, John Steinbeck and early twentieth-Century America.* PhD thesis.

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“Nature’s social union”:
Robert Burns, John Steinbeck
and Early Twentieth-Century America.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Philosophy

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Submission – April 2021

“Nature’s social union”: [1]
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Abstract

This thesis examines the connections between Robert Burns and John Steinbeck in order to determine whether the American author was influenced by the Scots poet and, if so, to what extent. There has been a tendency, both culturally and academically, to presume an influence given the latter’s appropriation of Burns’s phrase from ‘To a Mouse’ for the title of his 1937 novella, *Of Mice and Men.* Often, those who reference this link do not delve deeper into Steinbeck’s reasons for the naming of his novella.

The thesis explores how Steinbeck was exposed to the work of Burns as he grew up and developed his writing career in the early decades of the twentieth century. It also looks at Burns’s more general influence in the United States during this period. The thesis further examines evidence of the influence of Burns in *Of Mice and Men* and other Steinbeck novels, and considers the similarities in outlook, experience and political ideology between the two writers. Thus, this in-depth study into the influence of Burns on Steinbeck seeks to address the common assumptions about the connection between the two writers which, until now, have been based solely on Steinbeck’s usage of the title *Of Mice and Men.*

[1] From the poem titled ‘To a Mouse, On Turning her up in her Nest, with the plough, November, 1785’ in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns,* ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), I, pp. 127-28 (K 69, line 8). Hereafter, all references to Burns’s texts will be from Kinsley’s edition, and will be given with a short numbering reference within the body of the thesis (e.g. K 69). This poem will hereafter be referred to as ‘To a Mouse’.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Kirsteen McCue and Ronnie Young. I appreciate your advice, guidance and expertise but, most of all, I value your support through challenging times and periods of self-doubt.

To Frank and Susan Shaw, Atlanta, USA: I can say it was an honour to be the recipient of the Shaw Scholarship. Without your financial support, I simply would not have been able to undertake this thesis and pursue my long-standing interest in Burns and Steinbeck.

In Scotland, my research into Burns was assisted by staff at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. From South Carolina, I received valuable information and advice from Patrick Scott. My research into Steinbeck was assisted by many scholars in California and elsewhere in the States, including William Ray, Paul Douglass, Susan Shillinglaw and Barbara Heavilin. Thank you also to staff at: Ball State University; The Morgan Library and Museum, Columbia University; National Steinbeck Center, Salinas; Jefferson Library, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello; Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies, San Jose State University; Special Collections & University Archives, Stanford University; Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; Pacific Grove Public Library; Albert & Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

Thanks to my dad, who sparked a lifelong interest in Scotland, its culture and history.

The support of my wife, Lynn, was important as I attempted to juggle my research with doing a full-time job. Not only did you take on extra parenting duties, you helped to edit the final draft. Moreover, your own research into the 1920s and '30s proved an inspiration throughout. It also can't be forgotten that it was you who introduced me to the work of Steinbeck!

Thank you to James – hopefully I will have more time to play with you now.

Finally, thanks to Robert Burns and John Steinbeck – your enduring legacy proves an inspiration.

To Mum,

Who was genuinely interested in everything I ever did.

“It’s so much darker when a light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone.”

[John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*]

Introduction

It is a common occurrence, when researching the life or work of John Steinbeck (1902-1968), to find reference to the fact that he appropriated the title of his 1937 novella, *Of Mice and Men*, from Robert Burns's famous early poem, 'To a Mouse'. This piece of information is still regularly acknowledged, as noted in this review, published in 1999, by *The Washington Post*: "Burns understood something about life. So did John Steinbeck, who stole the Scottish poet's line about rodents for the title of his own 20th-century tragedy, 'Of Mice and Men'."[2] At the top of the review, the writer quotes the relevant lines from Burns's poem: "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men | Gang aft agley" (K 69). The use of the quote in a review of an entirely unrelated film illustrates how ubiquitous Burns and his work remains in a cultural sense. The source of this review being an American newspaper, having now mentioned 'To a Mouse', the writer finds it propitious to point out the connection to Steinbeck, which will be of interest to the publication's American readership. Similarly, whenever Steinbeck's name appears in an article, specifically in relation to *Of Mice and Men*, it is common for the writer of the article to point out that the title chosen by Steinbeck originates with Burns: "'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men, gang aft agley,' warns Robert Burns in the poem that inspired the title of John Steinbeck's 1937 novella."[3] However, the reference rarely delves any deeper into the connection between Burns and Steinbeck. Even in an acclaimed and respected biography of Steinbeck, there is only one passing reference to this link when the biographer examines *Of Mice and Men*: "The author remains detached throughout, blaming no one for the fact that, in Robert Burns's words, 'the best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley'."[4] As Brian Reinking observes, "Little research is required to discover the source of John Steinbeck's title for his 1937 novella *Of Mice and Men*."[5] Thus, until recently, the tendency has been just to acknowledge the source from which Steinbeck's title originates but not to explore the connection further.

Reinking, unlike the majority of commentators and reviewers, does look beyond the title and analyses the common themes in both poem and novel. The US literary scholars Carol McGuirk and Barbara Heavilin have examined the allusions Steinbeck makes to Burns's

[2] Michael O'Sullivan, 'A Simply Ingenious "Plan"', *The Washington Post*, 22 January, 1999. This is a review of the 1998 film, *The Simple Plan*.
[3] Mark Brown, 'Of Mice and Men: Subtleties lost in sound and fury', *The Telegraph*, 6 February, 2008.
[4] Jay Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography* (William Heinemann Ltd: London, 1994), p. 229.
[5] Brian Reinking, 'Robert Burns's Mouse In Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* And Miller's *Death of a Salesman*', *The Arthur Miller Journal,* 8.1 (Spring 2013), 15-32 (p. 15).

poem.[6] As McGuirk has shown, "Burns's analogy between mice and men as equally helpless against unforeseen disaster is the ironic fulcrum of Steinbeck's Depression-era tragedy."[7] Reinking, McGuirk and Heavilin have demonstrated the similarity in themes between this eighteenth-century poem and the twentieth-century novella, such as: the fate of innocence in an uncaring world; the harmony of nature being broken; the futility of planning in a world of uncertainty; empathy and kindness. However, until now, there has been no focused study of how influential Burns and his work was on Steinbeck beyond the apparent connections with this one novella. Thus, this thesis enquires if there is empirical evidence for Burnsian influence in the creative output or personal writings of John Steinbeck. Moreover, the thesis will examine the view of Burns prevalent in the America in which Steinbeck grew up, began and developed his writing career, in order to discover which particular perception of Burns was the one Steinbeck most likely encountered.

Growing up in the early twentieth century, Steinbeck was part of a wider culture which had an abiding interest in Burns, and a particular view of him as a man and a poet. The first chapter of this study, therefore, focuses on the perception, or perceptions, of Burns which predominated in the early decades of the twentieth century in America. Work on Burns's influence on transatlantic culture – his importance to writers, politicians, scholars and the wider public in North America - has grown significantly in recent years. This was partly prompted by the observation in 2012, by Leith Davis, Faith Nelson and Sharon Alker, that, despite the upsurge of interest in Burns around the time of the 250th anniversary of his birth in 2009, only two critical works had examined his influence in an international context and neither of these had touched upon America:

> Strangely missing from this renewal of critical energy is a study that considers Burns from a transatlantic perspective, despite his considerable impact in the Americas and his suitability as a subject for the rapidly expanding field of transatlantic studies.[8]

[6] Carol McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, Poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland', in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* ed by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012). Barbara A. Heavilin, '"the wall of background": Cultural, Political, and Literary Contexts of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*', *Steinbeck Review,* 15.1 (2018), 1-16 (p. 2).
[7] McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, Poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland', p. 183.
[8] Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson, eds, *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), p. 3.

Since that time, more has been written about this important aspect of Burns's reach into North America, including the work of Robert Crawford, Carol McGuirk and Arun Sood.[9] Crawford, for example, argues that Burns's appeal to American readers was inevitable, given the support for democratic ideals and equality evident in his work.[10] Crawford mentions Burns's sympathies for the American revolutionaries and his interest in and support of American democracy "which went against the orthodox current of political opinion about democracy."[11] The opening chapter of this thesis begins with an overview of the situation in the nineteenth century, building on the work of Arun Sood in illustrating the impact of Burns on well-known figures in American society of the time, including prominent writers, abolitionists and politicians, from Frederick Douglass to President Abraham Lincoln. The work of Sood and others has shown that Burns was widely viewed as a great poet of democracy who represented the noble ideals of the American nation.[12] The thesis, by way of archival and textual research, will determine if this view of Burns continued into the twentieth century and, indeed, if it remained unchanged throughout the early decades of Steinbeck's life. I will focus on alternative interpretations of Burns which existed at this time and the context in which they are apparent, exploring whether the image of Burns being shaped is due to the prevailing political reality of the time, or to particular contemporary events. Evidence for the academic study of Burns in early twentieth century America will be investigated, as will the existence of Burns's image in popular culture. The evidence for the existence of Burns both culturally and academically will be examined alongside the range of his influence on Steinbeck's thinking and creative work. The American author studied English literature at Stanford University and, therefore, the likelihood of Steinbeck encountering an academic portrayal of Burns requires consideration. Two of the foremost Burns scholars in the thirties were American - namely John DeLancey Ferguson (1888-1966) and Franklyn Bliss Snyder (1884-1958) – and, therefore, academic study of the Scots poet in America is prominent and respected at this time. Equally important is the investigation into the appearance of Burns in popular culture. References to Burns are ubiquitous: his image,

[9] For example: Robert Crawford, 'America's Bard' in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture*, ed by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); Carol McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, Poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland'; Arun Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America: Poetry, Print, and Memory, 1786-1866* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
[10] Crawford, 'America's Bard', pp. 99-116.
[11] Ibid., p. 101.
[12] It should be noted that critics have argued that, rather than there being a nationwide American appropriation of Burns as great poet of democracy, the reality of literary reception in the US is more complex. See, for example, Christopher Hanlon, *America's England: Antebellum Literature and Atlantic Sectionalism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 17-40).

for example, appears regularly in newspapers nationwide at this time; and his work features heavily in film, big band and recording culture, with songs such as 'Auld Lang Syne' being particularly prominent. Close acquaintances of Steinbeck, who were themselves prominent figures in popular culture, admired Burns and thus may have shared their admiration with the author. Steinbeck was from California and his home state featured prominently in much of his writing. Therefore, a further consideration of this chapter will be to determine whether a particular Californian or West Coast view of Burns existed, one which the young Steinbeck would have absorbed.

The second chapter focuses on Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, as the American writer's most obvious and well-known reference to the work of Burns. As mentioned above, this connection was the impetus for the present thesis and thus a detailed examination of these two works side-by-side is central to the project. Thematic similarities have been explored already by several prominent literary critics, and these studies will be addressed in more detail in the context of the overall thesis. However, the degree of Burns's influence on Steinbeck can only be properly determined by understanding the origins of the novella. Did the idea come from Steinbeck's own knowledge of Burns's poem and the themes therein, or elsewhere? The influence of Steinbeck's first wife, Carol, will be examined. It is known that it was she who provided her husband with the title for *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and Susan Shillinglaw has stated that Carol was also responsible for providing the title for *Of Mice and Men*.[13] Carol was certainly influential in Steinbeck's political involvement during the thirties and, in particular, his flirtation with Communism. The chapter, therefore, will touch upon Steinbeck's politics in the context of Carol's overall influence on the writer and the possibility that her input into the direction of the narrative of the novella was significant. However, Steinbeck's political views will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter. There were other major influential figures in Steinbeck's life during the thirties. The second chapter will further explore the alternative possibility that one of these, the biologist Ed Ricketts, may have been responsible for suggesting the novella's title.

Chapter one, as mentioned above, will show that the image of Robert Burns was ubiquitous in early twentieth-century America. The second chapter will examine the possibility that, rather than acquire his title for *Of Mice and Men* from his wife or a friend, it may simply have been as a result of the proverbial use of the saying, "The best-laid schemes

[13] Susan Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage* (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2013), p. 176.

o' Mice an' Men", which, as will be shown, was a commonly encountered phrase by this time. A further possibility is that the title came directly from Steinbeck's long-standing knowledge of Burns. In order to determine whether Steinbeck is likely to have been acquainted with the work of the poet, this chapter will present the results of research into, for example, periodicals to which the Steinbeck family subscribed in the early twentieth century, including *National Geographic*, *Collier's* and *Century Magazine*. It further explores the literary works Steinbeck was reading at Stanford University, both in class and in the English Club, a group of students and professors who met regularly to discuss all aspects of literature. An examination of the themes in the two works at this point can help to shed some light on the novella's origins; whether Steinbeck had always intended to follow the themes of 'To a Mouse' in *Of Mice and Men*, or whether this title being suggested to him prompted him to take the narrative in a new direction. For example, Tom Barden has suggested that it may have been after the title had been suggested to him that Steinbeck decided to include mice in the story.[14] This later inclusion of mice would certainly point to the closeness of the two works as being, at least partially, an afterthought. The examination of themes explored by the two writers will also identify the similarities in their respective outlooks. The parallels in their political viewpoints, albeit at notably different moments in history, will be explored more fully in the third chapter, but one other major similarity is in their sentimentality. As will be seen, Steinbeck and Burns have been criticised by some scholars for their overuse of sentimentality. Yet, a closer examination of this aspect of their work reveals a characteristic central to the enduring popularity of both poem and novella. Notwithstanding the importance of determining the source of the title for *Of Mice and Men* in understanding Steinbeck's motivation for exploring the themes therein, it is also important to ascertain whether Steinbeck returned to these themes in his later works. In other words, was the author's interest in Burns, and in particular 'To a Mouse', such that it is apparent in subsequent writing?

The third chapter comprises an examination of the similarities in political ideology between Burns and Steinbeck, while acknowledging that the worlds in which they lived were very different. The politics of both were tied to the landscape and it is pertinent to enquire, for the purposes of this thesis, whether the pastoral element to Steinbeck's work was influenced by his knowledge of Burns. Much of Burns's work champions agrarian self-

[14] Tom Barden, 'Of Mice and Meaning in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men'*, in *Critical Insights*: *Of Mice and Men*, edited by Barbara A. Heavilin (New York: Grey House Publishing, 2017), p. 136.

sufficiency, such as in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', and, similarly, the Jeffersonian agrarianism of Steinbeck is derived from his humanistic interest in democracy. The origins of Steinbeck's democratic views are explored in this third chapter of the thesis, which begins with an examination of an article from a periodical to which the Steinbeck family subscribed at their home in Salinas, California. I will argue that the themes of this article had a lasting impression on him and helped him develop his views on democracy. Moreover, it is argued in this chapter that the article and the ideology therein acted as a framework on which Steinbeck developed his own ideas in his great novels of social conscience of the thirties: *In Dubious Battle* (1936); *Of Mice and Men* (1939); *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Of particular relevance in the context of this thesis is the fact that the article specifically mentions Burns and identifies him as a champion of democracy. The sentiment of Burns's lines, "Man's inhumanity to Man | Makes countless thousands mourn!" (K 64), is reflected in Steinbeck's accounts of social injustice during this period, which is evident in novels including *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, and also in newspaper articles he wrote for the *San Francisco News* in 1936.

The chapter then proceeds to explore the more radical politics of both Burns and Steinbeck and asks, was Steinbeck influenced by Burns's radical views? Steinbeck is often perceived as having radical left-leaning views. Throughout much of his writing career he was in conflict with authority and suspected of being a Communist by many, including the FBI. These common perceptions will be examined in order to ascertain how deep-rooted Steinbeck's radicalism actually was and whether, in fact, similarities with Burns can more accurately be identified in relation to their suspected radicalism and respective conflicts with authority, rather than their radical beliefs per se. In the face of the condemnation they faced for their views, did both Steinbeck and Burns display the same ideological consistency and commitment to their respective causes? For example, Steinbeck pushed back so much against accusations of Communism that, in later years, he was accused by leftist groups of backsliding against his beliefs.[15]

Steinbeck and Burns both wrote about and felt a connection to their respective countries. They also both embarked on journeys across their nations, on travels that would help frame the subjects about which they would later write. In August 1787, Burns embarked on a 600-mile tour of the Highlands. He had gained some celebrity by this time, establishing

[15] Susan Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer' <https://sits.sjsu.edu/context/biographical/in-depth/index.html> [site accessed 3 February 2021].

himself as the "Bard of Ayrshire".[16] It is now agreed that, amongst other motives, he was setting out to build his networks and achieve wider recognition, becoming not only the "Heaven-taught ploughman"[17] of Ayrshire but a national voice. Burns was also noting his experiences and collecting ideas for future work. Steinbeck's visits to the migrant camps of California, and his subsequent articles relating the realities of the situation for Oklahoman migrants, were arguably his strongest inspiration for writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. Almost three decades later, as Steinbeck set out on his journey that would become *Travels with Charley* (1962), his intention was to attempt to re-unite with America at a time when he was feeling increasingly alienated from his country. His last book, *America and Americans* (1966), a collection of his thoughts about the United States and its people, may perhaps be evidence that, like Burns, Steinbeck could be perceived as having become the voice of his nation. This final chapter will examine the interest both Steinbeck and Burns had in their respective nations, which can be gleaned both from their creative output and their personal writings.

This is the first study to fully examine the creative contexts of Steinbeck's engagement with Burns and his work. With the recent renewal of interest in Burns from a transatlantic perspective, it is hoped that this thesis serves in some small but significant way in contributing to our understanding of the impact Burns had on early twentieth-century America, and his legacy in influencing, directly or indirectly, prominent American figures, most notably John Steinbeck.

[16] The word "Bard" was one Burns occasionally used about himself. Various epithets incorporating the word have been used ever since. An edition of his works published shortly after his death, for example, is entitled: *Poems ascribed to Robert Burns, the Ayrshire bard not contained in any edition of his work hitherto published* (Glasgow: 1801).

[17] Henry Mackenzie, review of the Kilmarnock Edition, *The Lounger,* no.97 (December 1786).

Chapter 1

'Like the wind through an Aeolian harp' – Robert Burns in Early Steinbeckian America

At the turn of the twentieth century, the prominent politician and senator for Massachusetts, Hon. George F. Hoar, wrote that, "The genius of Scotland sings through the soul of Burns like the wind through an Aeolian harp."[18] Hoar's simile to demonstrate the genius of Burns is an apt one, given how the poet himself occasionally made reference to the Aeolian harp in his poems and correspondence, as he does, for example, in 'Ode For General Washington's Birthday' (1794).[19]

> No Spartan tube, no Attic shell,
> No lyre Aeolian I awake;
> 'Tis liberty's bold note I swell,
> Thy harp, Columbia, let me take!
>
> (K 451)

Hoar was a campaigner for the rights of minority groups in America. As the country moved into a new century, his view of Burns as democrat is one that can be seen to continue among his countrymen in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, as this chapter shows, it is not a static image of Burns that prevails in America, but rather an image that alters, often to suit the national mood or in reaction to certain events.

In order to understand the influence of Robert Burns on John Steinbeck, one needs to first gain an understanding of the America in which Steinbeck grew up, and the nature of the relationship that country had with Burns in the early decades of the twentieth century. As Arun Sood and others have shown with regard to the nineteenth century,[20] Burns's poetry and life had an impact on prominent American writers, politicians and other contemporary public figures, and arguably, as a result, influenced the cultural and political direction of the nation.

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[18] A.C. White, 'American Appreciations of Burns', *Burns Chronicle* (1911), p. 85. The address was delivered by Hoar in Boston, 1901.

[19] The image was used a number of times by Burns in his letters. For example: "I can no more resist rhyming on the impulse, than an Eolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air", in a letter to Miss Davies, c1791 (L 472A); "Are we a piece of machinery that, like the Eolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident?" in a letter to Miss Dunlop, 1789 (L 293); "why the tones of her voice made my heartstrings thrill like an Eolian harp", to Dr John Moore, 1787 (L 125). In *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol.1, 1780-1789,* and *Vol. 2: 1790-1796,* second edition, ed. by J. DeLancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy (Oxford University Press, 1985). Hereafter, all references to Burns's letters will be from this edition, and will be given with an (L) number reference only within the body of the thesis.

[20] For example, Arun Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America: Poetry, Print, and Memory, 1786-1866* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

This chapter, therefore, will examine the early twentieth century Burns landscape in which Steinbeck first appeared and in which he began his writing career, building upon the work of Sood in relation to the nineteenth century by examining this later period. The chapter will provide an overview of both the scholarly opinion of Burns in America at this time, in addition to how the poet is perceived culturally. The cultural aspect will include an examination of the ubiquity of the image of Burns amongst writers, the media, the stage and screen and the wider American public.

In the nineteenth century, Burns was widely admired in the United States due largely to his perceived "American" ideals of democracy and freedom. Appreciation of the poet developed in part due to his interest in, and support of, the American War of Independence and his championing of themes of democracy in poems such as 'Ode for General Washington's Birthday' (K 451) and 'Ballad on the American War' (K 38). In 1793, Burns attended a dinner at which the host proposed a toast to William Pitt, the Prime Minister. In response, Burns allegedly remarked, "Let us drink the health of a greater and better man - George Washington."[21] Whether this story is true or not, it certainly helps to explain Burns's popularity in America by showing him as democrat and supporter of the fledgling United States. As James M. Montgomery has shown, many influential figures of the century, including presidents, writers and abolitionists, often quoted Burns's work. His ubiquity by the mid-nineteenth century is summed up by Sood: "On the 25th January, 1859, toasts to 'The Memory of Robert Burns' were heard at over 60 separate locations spread across different regions of the USA."[22] In fact, half a century earlier, as Clark McGinn has shown, St Andrew's dinners in the USA often included toasts to the memory of Burns.[23] Tributes to Burns at occasions such as St Andrew's dinners indicate that the popularity of the poet was largely based around Scots immigrants. However, as the century progressed, the theme of democracy becomes more apparent.

President Abraham Lincoln was a lifelong admirer of Burns,[24] regularly quoted him and was known to give toasts at Burns Night celebrations.[25] Robert Crawford calls Burns one

[21] Arun Sood, 'A Toast for George Washington, as well as an 'Ode'?' (2014), *Editing Robert Burns for the 21st Century* <https://burnsc21.glasgow.ac.uk/a-toast-for-george-washington-as-well-as-an-ode/> [site accessed 12 December 2020].
[22] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America,* p. 195.
[23] Clark McGinn, *The Burns Supper: A Comprehensive History* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2019).
[24] James M. Montgomery, 'How Robert Burns Captured America', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Volume 30, Issue 1 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 235-248 (p. 238).
[25] Ibid., p. 241.

of Lincoln's greatest literary inspirations.[26] On the opposite side of the Civil War divide, Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, was also an adherent, and even visited the cottage in which the poet was born.[27]

Sood has shown that nineteenth-century American writers held Burns in high regard. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, "emphatically conflated Burns's songs with the Declaration of Independence".[28] Franklyn Bliss Snyder has shown how many of the topics discussed by Burns and the other members of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club were surprisingly similar to those debated by Emerson in his literary society at Harvard University.[29] Mark Twain often mentioned Burns and, in 1880, he spoke at a Burns Night event in Chicago.[30] Walt Whitman, whose views of democracy and celebration of the common man later inspired Steinbeck, spoke of Burns as an example of "the good-natured, warm-blooded, proud-spirited, amative, alimentive, convivial man of the decent-born everywhere and any how."[31] It was not, in fact, always a love of his poetry per se that drew American writers to Burns but his "sheer humanity".[32] Sood gives the example of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Snr, writing a poem for the Boston Burns Club in 1859, in which he presented Burns as democratic Republican, constantly referring to Burns "the man" rather than his poetry.

Amongst these nineteenth-century writers, the work of John Greenleaf Whittier, the 'Quaker Poet' of Massachusetts, is particularly relevant in the context of this thesis. Sood mentions how Burns has often been cited as one of Whittier's most important influences and how Whittier even adopted Scots as a poetic language and, on occasion, wrote in Burns's Standard Habbie style.[33] Burns was clearly a formative influence on Whittier. In his 1854 poem, 'Burns. On Receiving a Sprig of Heather in Blossom', Whittier uses the sprig of heather as a metaphor for the work of Burns:

> No more these simple flowers belong
> To Scottish maid and lover;

[26] Robert Crawford, 'America's Bard' in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture*, ed by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 101.
[27] Montgomery, 'How Robert Burns Captured America', p. 242.
[28] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America,* p. 213.
[29] Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Archon Books, 1968), p. 70. A topic discussed by the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club, for example, 'Whether do we derive more happiness from Love or Friendship?' is similar to Emerson's, 'Which is most conducive to individual happiness, a state of celibacy or matrimony?'.
[30] Montgomery, 'How Robert Burns Captured America', p. 242.
[31] Crawford, 'America's Bard', p. 109.
[32] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America,* p. 139.
[33] Ibid., p. 125.

Sown in the common soil of song,
They bloom the whole world over.[34]

The poem deals with many aspects of Burns's character, including the democratic language of the verse:

O'er rank and pomp, as he had seen,
I saw the man uprising;
No longer common or unclean
The child of God's baptizing!

The depiction of Burns as democratic poet is, therefore, clearly evident. The poem further makes reference to Burns's appreciation of nature throughout. Sood comments on Whittier's pastoral themes and how, like Burns, he uses "the pastoral realm to reflect on universal themes."[35] A similar focus on themes of democracy and of the pastoral can be seen in the work of John Steinbeck. In *Cannery Row* (1945), for example, Steinbeck gives voice to previously marginalised groups such as prostitutes and Chinese immigrants. Characters from these demographics are seen in a positive light, as Whittier would describe, "No longer common or unclean."[36] Similarly, Steinbeck's sympathy for the common man can be seen in the form of the striking workers of *In Dubious Battle* (1936). Steinbeck focuses on the pastoral realm and its values in several of his novels, such as in *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), a series of related stories set in a Californian valley community. There is a copy of Whittier's *Complete Poetical Works* in the Steinbeck family collection so he would certainly have been familiar with Whittier's themes.[37]

Robert Burns, as Sood has shown, was popular among abolitionists in the nineteenth century: Samuel Ringgold Ward (1817-1866), Gerrit Smith (1797-1874), Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) and William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) all cited Burns in their various speeches and letters of the time.[38] However, most prominent amongst these anti-slavery advocates was Frederick Douglass, who visited Burns's birthplace in Alloway and also met the poet's sister, Isabella Burns Begg. The written account of this visit by Douglass, 'A Fugitive Slave Visiting the Birth-Place of Robert Burns,' became popular throughout the

[34] John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Poetical Works in Four Volumes* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1892).
[35] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America*, p. 127.
[36] Whittier, *The Poetical Works in Four Volumes*.
[37] Dr. Robert DeMott, *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed* (Garland, 1984).
[38] Clark McGinn, 'Burns and Slavery', electricscotland.com [site visited 3rd November 2020].

USA.[39] The first book Douglass had bought after his release from slavery was a copy of Burns.[40] This portrayal of Burns among abolitionists, however, presents an example of the conflicting views of the poet, and how his image was appropriated by political opponents. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, used 'To a Louse' as an initiation rite, which seems to be due to the fact that the founding members were of Scots descent and would, therefore, be familiar with the poem.[41] The appropriation of Burns by the Southern slave-holding states, as Sood suggests, can also be attributed to the comparisons drawn by ex-Confederate soldiers between the destruction of Highland culture after Culloden and the loss of Southern independence in the aftermath of the Civil War.[42] Thus, the political situation in America at the time shaped the disputed legacy of Burns. This is not a phenomenon unique to America and can also be seen occurring in Scotland. For example, Christopher Whatley has shown how both Chartists and Scottish Tories in the nineteenth century claimed Burns's legacy to further their own political ideals.[43] On both sides of the Atlantic, therefore, there was a dispute over the image of Burns. In the United States, however, the poet had particular significance for an emerging nation still in the process of trying to make sense of the principles on which it was founded. In this context, the predominant image of Burns that emerges from nineteenth-century America, though not the only image, is of a strong advocate of the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and justice that were at the heart of the fledgling United States.

By the twentieth century, although the legacy of slavery in the USA was very much still evident, the institution itself was no longer a part of American life and neither, therefore, was the championing of Burns by prominent abolitionists. This illustrates the changing perception of Burns over time. The poet continued to inspire African-American writers and Civil Rights activists well into the twentieth century with his themes of international brotherhood and, therefore, it could be argued that the perception of Burns was not changed but merely adapted to new circumstances as America moved from Reconstruction, through the Jim Crow era into the rise of the Civil Rights movement. Maya Angelou (1928-2014),

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[39] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America*, p. 170.
[40] Crawford, 'America's Bard', p. 107.
[41] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America,* p. 160. As the person being initiated was also dressed up as an ass during the ceremony, presumably the symbolism of being able "To see oursels as ithers see us!" and their own particular concepts of honour were of importance to the organisation.
[42] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America*, p. 185.
[43] "It Is Said That Burns Was a Radical": Contest, Concession, and the Political Legacy of Robert Burns, ca. 1796—1859, Christopher A. Whatley, *Journal of British Studies,* 50.3 (July, 2011), 639-666.

one of America's most celebrated poets, authors and civil rights activists, often spoke of her love of Burns's work, especially 'The Slave's Lament',[44] a song which shows Burns as "the friend of humanity and an enemy of justice or oppression."[45] Robert Crawford has described how Burns became important to Angelou: "Growing up mute, poor and black in the American South, Angelou developed a lifelong and deep conviction that 'Robert Burns belonged to me'."[46] Like Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century, Angelou made a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Burns. Visiting in 1996, on the 200th anniversary of the poet's death, she said: "He was the first white man I read who seemed to understand that a human being was a human being, and that we are more alike than unalike."[47]

As already noted, this changing image of the poet is not relevant purely to the nineteenth century. Is the American vision of Burns as 'democratic' poet still as prevalent in the America of the early twentieth century? Sood concludes:

> Burns's popularity in the United States has most commonly been attributed to his kinship with 'National' American ideals of freedom, egalitarianism and individual liberty. This common claim, bolstered by notable writers, poets, critics and biographers, has persisted from the mid-nineteenth century right through to the present day.[48]

While this may be true in part, it is important not to assume that these reasons applied to the entire nation. America, particularly in the nineteenth century, was heavily divided politically, especially between North and South. On many issues, including the contemporary perception of Burns, there was no unifying, all-encompassing view. Sood has also suggested that Burns's popularity was waning in America by the early decades of the twentieth century, after enjoying something of a heyday in the nineteenth century:

> For much of the twentieth century, however, Burns was considered a poet of limited linguistic range and geographical significance. His poetry rarely appeared in Romantic anthologies or university English curriculums, resulting in a literary reputation habitually reduced to archaic, sentimental and popular Scottish contexts.[49]

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[44] Crawford, 'America's Bard', p. 108. It should be noted, however, that Burns's authorship is debated. Kinsley notes (K 378) that "Burns's part in this song is uncertain."
[45] Clark McGinn, 'Robert Burns and Slavery' - https://www.scotland.org/features/robert-burns-and-slavery [site visited 3 November 2020].
[46] Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (London: Jonathon Cape, 2009), p. 6.
[47] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-27607730 [site visited 3 November 2020].
[48] Arun Sood, *Eighty years 'Owre the Sea': Robert Burns and the early United States of America, c. 1786-1866,* (University of Glasgow: PhD Thesis, 2016), p. 212.
[49] Sood, *Robert Burns and the United States of America*, p. 3.

Nevertheless, this chapter will show that Burns was still an influential figure in America at this time, and, further, that his continued, or renewed, popularity is due largely to some of the traits – freedom, egalitarianism, democracy – mentioned above.

Burns in Early Twentieth-century American Scholarship

Notwithstanding Sood's argument that Burns's popularity was on the decline in America by the early twentieth century, the very fact that arguably "the foremost twentieth-century authority on Robert Burns" was an American is indicative of the esteem in which he was held in that country at this time.[50] John DeLancey Ferguson was a renowned authority on Burns. Although he did not begin his academic career as a Burns scholar, his *The Letters of Robert Burns*, published in 1931, was the first comprehensive edition of the poet's correspondence. His 1939 biography of Burns, *Pride and Passion: Robert Burns, 1759-1796*, was described by G. Ross Roy as "a landmark in Burns scholarship" and Roy finds it to be "one of the three or four most important biographies of Burns".[51] The biography, alongside his other work on Burns, is still relevant and instructive today. Corey Andrews writes that one of Ferguson's main aims was "to examine the poet's work in its entirety, without prejudice or the desire to expurgate 'undesirable' material in the canon."[52] As Andrews's work has shown, many nineteenth-century editions of the poet's correspondence had censored material which contradicted the romanticised image of Burns. DeLancey Ferguson had frequent articles published in the *Burns Chronicle* throughout the 1920s and 1930s, thus demonstrating the esteem in which his research was held within the world of Burns studies, and the wider academic community, at this time.[53]Writing in 1939, Ferguson also mentions the prominence of the topic of democracy within Burns's works:

> At the end of August, 1793, his impotent fury over the Edinburgh sedition trials, combined with his enthusiasm at the news of the French levy en masse for the repulse of the Allied invasion, found an outlet in composing 'Scots Wha Hae' to this air. [Hey Tutti Taitie] Historically the song is an anachronism. The ideas underlying it are those of Rousseau and Thomas

[50] Obituary of John DeLancey Ferguson, *Burns Chronicle* (1967), p. 56.
[51] From a 2011 interview with G Ross Roy by Corey Andrews, Youngstown State University, and published in 'John DeLancey Ferguson (1888-1966): An Appreciation' in https://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives147.htm [site visited 3 November 2020].
[52] Corey Andrews, 'John DeLancey Ferguson (1888-1966): An Appreciation' in https://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives147.htm [site visited 3 November 2020].
[53] Articles in *Burns Chronicle*, for example, 1929, 1930, 1931.

> Jefferson and not of the feudal Middle Ages.[54]

Ferguson thus demonstrates how Burns's views on democracy continued to be important to Americans into the twentieth century. Mention of Jeffersonian themes of democracy, furthermore, illustrates that Ferguson was not simply an American writing about Burns, but could also be described as providing a uniquely American context to his work. In fact, in the preface to this biography about the poet, he acknowledges this:

> Lest British readers charitably assume that I sin through ignorance, I ought perhaps also to add that in writing of Burns's world I have not hesitated to equate some of its social and political aspects with their twentieth-century American analogues. To describe a dead world in dead terms seems a poor way of revivifying it.[55]

It is now clear that the role undertaken by DeLancey Ferguson in Burns studies during this period was groundbreaking. This challenges Sood's contention that, for much of the twentieth century, Burns was considered of limited significance. It does seem that the so-called "Burns cult" of the nineteenth century had been tempered and there was a more measured approach to research into his life and works, but prominent detailed scholarly work was still widely being undertaken. However, the level of scholarly interest in Burns changed as the century progressed. For example, a 1967 obituary of DeLancey Ferguson describes him thus: "A demanding professor, he intelligently trained a generation of American students of Robert Burns, which, today, trains yet another generation."[56] Conversely, a 1959 article laments the fact that the study of Burns by American students was at that time limited, that it would be unusual to find a freshman in an English class in a typical American university "who is required to read more than one poem or song by Robert Burns."[57] The author states that study of Burns had been much more widespread and in-depth in the recent past. Academic study of the poet, therefore, fluctuates throughout the century.

DeLancey Ferguson was not alone in his preoccupation with the Scottish poet. Another American scholar of Burns who was a proponent of this more professional, less moralistic scholarship was Franklyn Bliss Snyder. Snyder was born in Connecticut and

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[54] John DeLancey Ferguson, *Pride and Passion: Robert Burns, 1759-1796* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 272.
[55] Ibid., p. ix.
[56] Obituary of John DeLancey Ferguson, *Burns Chronicle* (1967), p. 56.
[57] Robert Donald Thornton, University of South Carolina, 'Burns and America To-Day', *Burns Chronicle* (1959), p. 43.

received a PhD in English from Harvard University, his thesis being on Robert Burns. This research was published as *The Life of Robert Burns* in 1932. He joined Northwestern University in Illinois in 1909 and was elected president of the university thirty years later.[58] As with Ferguson, Snyder believed that Burns's views on democracy were central to his popularity in the America of the twentieth century and, in *The Life of Robert Burns*, he wrote:

> His utterances on such matters as religion, democracy, and what has recently come to be called internationalism, are in harmony with the truest ideals of today. In all these he was far ahead of his age.[59]

The democratic spirit of Burns's 'A Man's A Man' is, according to Snyder, "the best expression of Burns's social and political philosophy at the close of his life."[60] For Snyder, therefore, this is an essential trait of Burns and a crucial reason why he remained popular in America. In a letter published in the 1931 *Burns Chronicle*, Snyder writes to inform readers that the study of the life and works of Burns forms part of the graduate school curriculum at Northwestern University. It is a popular course and each year attracts twelve to fifteen masters or doctorate students. Snyder explains that the course:

> undertakes to introduce students not only to Burns's works, but also to the ever-growing mass of material concerning Burns, and to equip them with enough critical acumen to enable them to sort out from this material those items which are likely to prove of real significance.[61]

Therefore, the study of Burns, in Illinois at least, appears to be flourishing in the 1930s. Certainly the work undertaken by American scholars was valued by the wider Burns academic community. Snyder's *The Life of Robert Burns*, for example, was reviewed in the *Burns Chronicle* in glowing terms:

> It is difficult, in reviewing this new 'Life' of Burns, to keep admiration under commendable restraint and to refrain from what might seem exaggerated praise. Both author and publishers have done their parts so well that the book is bound to become, and for a long time to remain, the standard record of Burns's life.[62]

Snyder is described in the same review as an author "supremely qualified, by acquired knowledge and by natural endowment." Like Ferguson, Snyder had several articles published

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[58] 'Northwestern University Archives: The Presidents of Northwestern', <http://exhibits.library.northwestern.edu/archives/exhibits/presidents/snyder.html> [site accessed 6 April 2021].
[59] Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p. 183.
[60] Ibid., p. 422.
[61] Franklyn Bliss Snyder, 'A Burns Seminar' (letter), *Burns Chronicle* (1931), p. 91.
[62] John Purdie, *Burns Chronicle* (1933), p. 109.

in the *Burns Chronicle* in the 1930s. In one of these, entitled 'Readings from Burns's Poetry,' notes from readings given by Snyder the previous year at the request of the National Broadcasting Company were reproduced. The fact that Snyder had been asked to present these readings as part of a nationwide broadcast, "from Chicago to the Pacific," is evidence enough of Burns's enduring popularity. The readings attempted to explain reasons for this:

> The Scotsman, the Russian, the German, the Englishman, the Japanese, and the American all know him, either in his own musical dialect or in translation; they know him; they love him; and they find in him courage and consolation and beauty and a fine independence of spirit that acts like a tonic to a man's soul.[63]

This explanation is important in realising how Burns was perceived in America at this time. As well as his views on democracy, he was seen as representing an independence of spirit, as displaying personal freedom, the independence of the individual. This view appears to have wide appeal in America at the time. For example, John M. Graham, a delegate from Atlanta, Georgia, at the Annual Conference of the Burns Federation in 1930, spoke about how Burns represented "a certain attitude to life and humanity" and that he voiced, "more than any other poet, the passion for political liberty and individual independence."[64]

Therefore, there appears to be a significant amount of scholarly activity in relation to Burns in the America of the twenties and thirties and this activity was actively addressing what Burns meant to Americans. The work of DeLancey Ferguson and Bliss Snyder is of particular relevance, as they were writing in the 1930s, proposing that Burns's popularity stemmed from his democratic views at a time when John Steinbeck was developing his writing to reflect his own democratic beliefs in stories which are centred around the political realities of Depression-era America.[65] As a further example of the interest in Burns in American academic circles, the *Burns Chronicle* of 1938 contains an appeal from a Miss Alice M. Clarke from the University of Denver, Colorado, who was working on a study on 'The vogue and influence of Robert Burns in America,' and appealed to the readers, in America and elsewhere, for any relevant information they have which will enable her "to arrive at the correct conclusions with regard to Robert Burns and his influence on American

[63] Franklyn Bliss Snyder, 'Readings from Burns's Poetry', *Burns Chronicle* (1935), p. 102.
[64] 'The Burns Federation at Greenock: Civil Reception', *Burns Chronicle* (1931) p. 20.
[65] Particularly in the so-called "Dustbowl Trilogy" of *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

thought and writing."[66] This again demonstrates the level of scholarly and lay scholarly interest in Burns at the time and, in particular, the influence he is perceived to have had on the America of the twentieth century.

The presence of so much Burns-related material in collections across America further demonstrates the scholarly, and wider cultural, interest in the poet. In 1906, the American banker and bibliophile, J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913), purchased the 'Dalhousie Manuscript'[67], containing correspondence of Burns with, amongst others, Frances Dunlop, a friend and regular correspondent of the poet. Among these papers is correspondence between Burns and George Thomson concerning 'Auld Lang Syne' and other songs in relation to Thomson's proposed collection of Scottish airs, for which Burns provided "poetical assistance". The purchase brought a great deal of publicity in New York at the time.[68] A *New York Times* story, "Rare Burns Originals Bought by J.P. Morgan" gave a detailed account of the transaction and proclaimed that he, "may have got the best of the Bard's poems."[69] Subsequent high-profile exhibitions involving the collection at The Morgan Library have ensured the works of Burns have remained well-known.[70] The sale of the so-called Glenriddell Manuscripts a few years later further highlights the interest in Burns in the United States at that time. These manuscripts consist of two leather-bound volumes. These were presented by Burns to his friend and near-neighbour at Ellisland Farm, Robert Riddell. One volume contains 57 poems, gifted to Riddell in April 1791.The second volume, containing copies of letters in Burns's own hand, was never given to Riddell, as Burns intended, due to the breaking down of the relationship between the poet and the Riddell family. At Burns's request, the first volume was returned to him following Riddell's death in 1794. Thereafter, the manuscripts came into the possession of Burns's biographer, Dr James Currie. They then stayed with the Currie family until 1853 when they were presented to the Liverpool Athenaeum. There was an outcry in Scotland when the manuscripts were sold, in 1913, to an American dealer and they left British shores. However, the following year they were

[66] Alice M. Clarke, 'An Appeal', under 'Notes, Queries and Answers', *Burns Chronicle* (1938), p. 84.
[67] A collection of letters and songs sent by Burns to George Thomson for Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs.*
[68] See, for example, articles in the *New York Times*, 3 November 1906 and 7 March 1906. For a detailed discussion of this, see *Robert Burns's Songs for George Thomson*, vol.4 of *The Works of Robert Burns,* ed. Kirsteen McCue (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.xlix.
[69] *New York Times* (3 November, 1906).
[70] In New York, there is also a collection of Burns manuscripts in the New York Public Library, including several letters of the poet.

purchased by John Gribbel of Philadelphia. His donation of the manuscripts to the people of Scotland was significant news on both sides of the Atlantic and, therefore, brought Burns back into the spotlight in America. There was a great deal of speculation as to where in Scotland the manuscripts may end up. The *Washington Post* summed up the situation; under the headline "Fight For Burns Mss", they described how several Scottish towns and cities were in the running to be their final destination:

> There is something like a scramble for possession of the Glenriddell manuscripts of Robert Burns. Thanks to the generosity of the American buyer, the manuscripts are to be restored to Scotland.[71]

The newspaper says that, at the time of the article, "the balance of opinion inclines to the cottage of Alloway."[72] However, they eventually ended up in Edinburgh where, in 2014, a century after their return to the poet's homeland, the manuscripts were the subject of a major exhibition by the National Library of Scotland.[73]

The G. Ross Roy collection at the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library is one of the world's foremost collections dedicated to Robert Burns and is still extremely important for the study of the poet into the twenty-first century.[74] There are approximately six thousand items described in the catalogue, which was published in 2009, including rare items such as a "Kilmarnock Edition" of Burns's *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786). For the years between 1910 and 1940, there are over forty-five American-published editions of printed materials, books and sheet music relating to Burns.[75] G. Ross Roy (1924-2013) was born in Canada and was himself a scholar of Burns, known for his *The Letters of Robert Burns,* his pivotal edition building on DeLancey Ferguson's earlier *Letters* newly edited for Oxford University Press in 1985, and for founding the scholarly journal, *Studies in Scottish Literature.* He built one of the world's most comprehensive collections on Burns and donated it to the University of South Carolina in 1989. Further major collections of Burns materials are found in Philadelphia and New York. The Rosenbach collection, described as "one of the most significant collections of Burns original

[71] *Washington Post*, 2 January, 1914, p. 6.
[72] Ibid.
[73] The National Library of Scotland <https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/treasures/glenriddell-manuscripts> [site accessed 26 February 2021].
[74] 'The G. Ross Roy Collection of Burnsiana & Scottish Literature' <https://digital.library.sc.edu/collections/the-g-ross-roy-collection-of-burnsiana-scottish-literature/> [site accessed 26 February 2021].
[75] Elizabeth A. Sudduth, ed. *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns: An Illustrated Catalog*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2009).

materials available anywhere",[76] was compiled by Dr Alexander Rosenbach in Philadelphia. The collection includes the copy of the Kilmarnock Edition owned by Burns's friend, Mrs Frances Dunlop. There is also correspondence with Mrs Dunlop, as well as with Maria Riddell and Agnes McLehose. Rosenbach, a scholar and bibliophile who became one of the most prominent dealers in rare books and manuscripts in America, put together his Burns materials in partnership with his brother, Philip. The collection, which also contains manuscripts of poems such as 'Tam o' Shanter' and 'Scots Wha Hae', became an important part of the Rosenbach Museum and Library which was established in the 1950s following the death of the brothers. As well as the rich collectors of Burns material, there were also what may be described as enthusiastic collectors of Burnsiana whose collections, and love of the poet, helped to keep his memory alive. John D. Ross (1853-1939), originally from Scotland, worked in the New York Public Library and wrote or edited 32 books on Burns. He was also an Honorary Life President of the Burns Federation. Ross gathered a wide array of material on all aspects of Burns's life. In a review of Ross's *Who's Who in Burns*, the *New York Times* describes how he:

> collected all the information it was possible to gather about all the persons mentioned by the poet in his works and about the friends and acquaintances who held important places in his life.[77]

Therefore, it is evident that there is a great deal of interest in Burns among the scholarly and wider American community through the early decades of the twentieth century. This is apparent in academia, although it is not the case that Burns was uniformly studied and taught geographically across the country, or that there was the same depth of interest consistently through this period. While Robert Thornton lamented that, in the mid-twentieth century, many American students of English literature were hardly introduced to Burns at all, DeLancey Ferguson ensured a generation of students were taught Burns from the twenties and thirties right up until his death in the 1960s. Furthermore, scholars such as Ferguson and Franklyn Bliss Snyder believed that a major reason for the continuing popularity for Burns in America was his views on democracy. An article in the 1930 *Burns Chronicle*, which aims to answer the question, 'What is thought of Burns by Americans,' argues, once again, that the answer lies in the poet's democratic principles, that it is to be expected that Burns should find admirers in the United States:

[76] 'The Rosenbach Library and Museum, Philadelphia', *Burns Chronicle* (Summer 2012), p. 31.
[77] *New York Times,* 28 August 1927.

> whose government rests upon the principle that law is a rule of action based on the consent and made by the intelligence of the individual whom it constrains, for each citizen has a right to impress his idea on the law to be obeyed equally with every other citizen.[78]

The popularity of Burns from a scholarly perspective is further influenced by the growth of collections of manuscripts and correspondence relating to the poet in private libraries across America.

Burns in Early Twentieth-century Popular Culture

While the image of Burns among scholars remained high-profile throughout much of the early twentieth century, it is equally important to examine the cultural perception of Burns across America in this period. As will be seen in chapter two, John Steinbeck's exposure to Burns in an academic setting is not likely to have been significant. Therefore, understanding the prominence of Burns in American culture at this time is vital to determining what awareness the American writer had of the poet. This section will, therefore, include an investigation into how Burns was viewed as an influential figure by writers and other artists and how his work was used widely within American stage, screen and even big band culture. It will also discuss how he was perceived in America more widely, including his ubiquity in society in general.

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, also known as the St Louis World's Fair, was held in St Louis, Missouri, between 30th April and 1st December 1904. The fair included hundreds of thousands of objects, peoples, animals, displays and publications from 62 exhibiting countries.[79] The fair was a resounding success and attracted almost 20 million visitors. One of the exhibits was a replica of Robert Burns's birthplace, built especially for the event. Funded by hundreds of subscribers, including President Theodore Roosevelt, the cottage turned out to be one of the most popular exhibits. It was unveiled on 24th June, the anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, amid a ceremony of bagpipes and speeches. At the end of the fair, the cottage was dismantled and shipped to Portland, Oregon, for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition, which ran from 1st June until 15th October that year. In 1910, another replica of Burns Cottage was built by the Burns Club of Atlanta. Designed by club

[78] Joseph Jacobs , 'What is thought of Burns by Americans', *Burns Chronicle* (1930), pp. 116-121.
[79] Missouri Digital Heritage - https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh_splash/default.asp?coll=muellis

member, and architect, Thomas H. Morgan, the Atlanta Burns Cottage was officially unveiled in 1911.[80] Another example of a replica Burns Cottage is the one from Westfield, New Jersey, which is depicted on the cover of the May 1930 issue of *Your Home* magazine, described thereon as "an American adaptation of the poet's birthplace."[81] That multiple reproductions of the poet's birthplace are being built at various sites across the United States, shows how widespread the appeal of Burns was at this time.

As with the nineteenth century presidential appreciation of Burns demonstrated by Abraham Lincoln, the poet was similarly admired by twentieth-century presidents. Calvin Coolidge, at the time Vice-President of the United States, but who would go on to become President within two years, wrote of Burns that: "There is no other poet who so has the power to hold the imagination of the people." Coolidge does not focus on Burns's views on democracy or freedom, but nevertheless builds up a picture of Burns as patriot, describing Burns's love of country and its beauty as a defining characteristic of the poet: "He loved her soil, broken with streams and made beautiful with flowers."[82] Strange sentiments, perhaps, for a President who was to lead the United States through much of the Roaring Twenties, "a decade of dynamic social and cultural change, materialism and excess."[83] However, during this period of rapid modernisation, he was respected for delivering a degree of security and respectability for the American people. Coolidge illustrates this appreciation of stability when describing Burns as representing "the image of the great strength of character of the Scottish people." Burns's greatness stems from "his powerful representation of the fundamental marks of true character."[84] Such displays of character and durability in the face of hardship was similarly a feature of many of the characters in the works of Steinbeck, particularly in his "Dustbowl Trilogy" of the 1930s, written shortly after the presidency of Coolidge and during the Great Depression.[85] Ma Joad sums up her family's experiences in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939):

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[80] Thomas Keith , 'Another Burns Cottage', *Burns Chronicle* (1999) p. 34.
[81] Ibid., p. 32.
[82] Hon. Calvin Coolidge, Communication at the unveiling of Burns statue, Cass Park, Detroit, Michigan (July 1921).
[83] <https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/calvin-coolidge> [site accessed 26 February 2021].
[84] Hon. Calvin Coolidge, Communication at the unveiling of Burns statue, Cass Park, Detroit, Michigan (July 1921).
[85] The so-called Dustbowl Trilogy comprises *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

> Why, Tom – us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people – we go on.[86]

As Sood's work illustrates, Burns was important to nineteenth-century writers in America. Similarly, in the twentieth century, Burns was often cited as an influence amongst prominent writers of the time. William Faulkner (1897-1962), author of novels such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), at a young age began mimicking romantic writers, specifically Robert Burns.[87] The author Willa Cather (1873-1947), who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for the novel *One of Ours* (1922) and was a favourite author of Steinbeck's first wife, Carol, mentions the Burns poems 'Death and Dr. Hornbook', 'Tam o' Shanter' and 'The Jolly Beggars' in her 1915 novel *The Song of the Lark*. She taught English for two years at Pittsburgh High School and works of Burns were amongst the required reading for her second-year students.[88] The American poet, Robert Frost (1874-1963), was deeply influenced by Burns from an early age. Although his father named him after the Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, his mother, a Scottish immigrant from Edinburgh, supposedly agreed to the name Robert as it:

> reminded her of the famous Scottish poet Robert Burns, whose poems she liked to recite, and of the equally famous Scotsman Robert the Bruce, the king who had won independence from England in the early 1300s.[89]

His mother introduced the young Frost to Burns, as well as to other Scottish writers such as Sir Walter Scott and George MacDonald. He and his wife, Elinor, named one of their daughters Lesley, after the Burns song 'Ye Bonie Lesley'.[90] Frost spent a long career as a teacher, working in various American colleges. As Henry Hart writes, his fascination with Burns led to him being interested "in the way Robert Burns wrote formal poems in a Scottish dialect, and so had his students memorize and recite some of Burns's poems."[91] He was also known to defend the reputation of Burns to contemporaries. Once, when T.S. Eliot suggested that William Dunbar was the only worthy Scottish poet, Frost angrily responded, "Might we consider Burns a *song writer*?"[92] Thus, the influence of Burns remains strong amongst writers

[86] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 20.
[87] The Biography.com website, <https://www.biography.com/writer/william-faulkner> [site accessed 26 February 2021].
[88] Willa Cather, Letter to Theodore Hornberger (May, 1946).
[89] Henry Hart, *The Life of Robert Frost* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), p. 18.
[90] Ibid., p. 105.
[91] Ibid., p. 142.
[92] Ibid., p. 273.

of the twentieth century. John Steinbeck would later become friendly with Faulkner, and Jay Parini has suggested that Frost's poems focusing on the way people responded to external pressures were an influence on Steinbeck as he was writing *The Pastures of Heaven*.[93]

Amongst these writers and their varying levels of interest in Burns, the work of Jesse Stuart (1906-1984) is particularly relevant. Born in Kentucky, Stuart was one of the most popular Appalachian writers of the 1930s and won national acclaim in 1934 for his book of poems, *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*. He was named Poet Laureate of Kentucky twenty years later. Of rural stock, Stuart was raised in Kentucky hill country and worked the fields where he lived. He had a long-standing interest in Scotland, and in 1937 he was able to take a trip to the country of his paternal ancestors. With a particular interest in Robert Burns, "who had been a ploughboy just like Stuart," he was sure to visit Burns's grave on a visit to Scotland in 1937.[94] He says he "feasted on the poetry of Robert Burns."[95]

> I would read his poetry every spare minute I had. I carried his poems wherever I went. I thought I had never heard words more beautiful than those in "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton." It was sung in school once or twice each week. The sentiment of that song choked me, for I loved it deeply.[96]

Taking inspiration from the Scottish poet, he has often been described as an "American Robert Burns"[97], as "some sort of natural rustic genius, a "bardic" singer of the hills, even a reincarnation of Bobbie Burns himself."[98] The fact that such a prominent and prolific regional American writer has been so widely compared to Burns in itself illustrates how prominent the memory of Burns still was in the minds of Americans.[99]

Burns's works also proved an inspiration for Arthur Miller (1915-2005). As argued by Brian Reinking, the work of Burns was important to Miller, and the influence Burns's 'To a

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[93] Jay Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography* (William Heinemann Ltd: London, 1994), p. 168. NB. *The Pastures of Heaven* was being written just as many of Frost's poems were being published.
[94] 'A Force of Nature: The Life and Work of Jesse Stuart' (August 9th, 2015) – on the website <https://www.buckeyemuse.com/a-force-of-nature-the-life-and-work-of-jesse-stuart/> [site accessed 24 December 2020].
[95] J.R. LeMaster, ed., *Jesse Stuart On Education* (University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 41. (quote taken from Stuart's *Beyond Dark Hills*).
[96] Ibid.
[97] 'Obituary of Jesse Stuart', *New York Times*, 19 February, 1984.
[98] Edwin T. Arnold, 'The Canonization of Jesse Stuart', *Appalachian Journal,* 13.1 (Fall 1985), 28-33 (p. 28).
[99] Burns's influence is also present in the mid-twentieth-century work of the radical poets of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Robert Creeley (1926-2005), who was inspired by Burns as a boy, later edited *The Essential Burns* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1989).

Mouse' had on Miller is another example of how the view of the poet changed as the twentieth century progressed. In *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Miller takes themes from Burns's poem – the futile hope and fruitless planning for the future – and applies it to the failed American Dream.

> It represents the truth about the American Dream and American capitalism and how an individual in America can be destroyed by the myth of tomorrow and the culture's mammonism.[100]

Miller was sceptical of the growing consumer culture of the United States in the aftermath of the Second World War and, in some ways, *Death of a Salesman*, written in 1948, is a reaction to the materialism of the time. The work of Miller thus further exemplifies how the influence of Burns on America was being shaped by contemporary events.

The awareness and appreciation of Burns in America is also illustrated by the number of Burns clubs in existence and the fact that they continued to be formed as the century progressed. The Trenton Burns Club, New Jersey, for example, was instituted in 1919 and federated the following year with the following aim:

> It is our avowed purpose to foster, encourage, and cultivate a love for the songs of Scotland, and chiefly to perpetuate the memory and works of Robert Burns, commemorate his birth, and enjoy that boundless wealth of song with which he has endowed our nature and his native land, and which flows through the world in dignified and manly sentiments, enlightening and enobling all humanity.[101]

Three years later, an article in the *Burns Chronicle*, perhaps in a backlash against the culture of excess that was beginning to take root in America, was hoping that, in the Burns Federation, may be found "the germ of a world brotherhood far above the more sordid realms of statecraft, politics, or gold."[102] By 1926 there were thirteen U.S. clubs affiliated to the Burns Federation, distributed nationwide. These were: Chattanooga; Oregon; Colorado Springs; Atlanta; Trenton; Harriman; Duluth; Detroit; Philadelphia; St. Louis; Troy; Dundalk, Maryland; Buffalo.[103] Three years later it was reported that the Greater New York Masonic Burns Club had just completed its first year. Having started with 68 members, they now had 150. There was a steady growth, therefore, in both the number of Burns clubs and, seemingly,

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[100] Brian Reinking, 'Robert Burns's Mouse In Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* And Miller's *Death of a Salesman*', p. 15.
[101] *Burns Chronicle* (1921), p. 219.
[102] *Burns Chronicle* (1924), p. 4.
[103] *Burns Chronicle* (1926), p. 176.

in the number of members these clubs had. An article by the late Joseph Jacobs asks in the 1930 *Burns Chronicle*:

> Would it be without the bounds of reasonable expectation to predict that, by the time another centennial of Burns's birth be celebrated, every state of the American Union will contain an appropriate statue erected on its soil to the memory of Burns and every considerable centre of culture and population will have within its limits a prosperous Burns Club, whose membership shall represent such varied elements of derived nationality and lineage as shall betoken the near approach to the consummation of universal brotherhood?[104]

In reality, by the time of the Bicentennial of Burns's birth, there were only 17 Burns clubs in the USA, after a high of 19 in 1933, rather than "every considerable centre of culture and population". Nevertheless, it does seem that interest in the poet through Burns clubs did remain fairly steady through the early decades of the twentieth century and into the later part of the century. Whilst membership did remain steady, the Burns clubs were not immune to the effects of contemporary events. The Greater New York Masonic Burns Club, in 1934, reported that financially they had been "very severely hit by the Depression", although they had not suffered in terms of attendance.[105]

With regard to statues, Jacobs' prediction did not quite come to fruition either. In fact, the majority of Burns statues were commissioned between the end of the nineteenth century up until around 1930, and there were no further statues erected in the United States between 1930 and 1959, though this was due more to the prevailing statuary culture and memorial practice in the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries rather than relative popularity of Burns.[106] Though the presence of so many statues to Burns in North America in the early decades of the twentieth century does attest to the poet's popularity on that side of the Atlantic, to attribute the phenomenon solely to his perceived democratic qualities and the view of him within North American society as a "man of the people" is perhaps misleading. For example, the unveiling events for these statues, although regularly well attended, can be seen as stiff, formal affairs, with a very conservative view of Burns being presented. In relation to Canadian unveiling ceremonies, Michael Vance has described, as Christopher Whatley has done with Scottish unveilings in the nineteenth century, that there is little

[104] Joseph Jacobs (deceased), 'What is thought of Burns by Americans', *Burns Chronicle* (1930), p. 120.
[105] *Burns Chronicle* (1934), p. 113.
[106] 'Robert Burns Memorials Worldwide' <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/robertburnsstudies/ourresearch/burns/robertburnsmonumentsworldwide/> [site accessed 26 February 2021].

evidence for alternative views of the poet at these events. Although there had been a proposal for the unveiling of the Toronto statue to be moved to a Saturday to enable working men to attend, for example, the committee minute book records that this did not come to pass.[107] Notwithstanding the fact that this relates to Canadian ceremonies rather than those in the United States, it is apparent that those on the southern side of the border were similarly sombre. At the 1908 unveiling ceremony at San Francisco, for example, when the five-year-old John Steinbeck was growing up in nearby Salinas, the attendees in surviving photographs appear rather formal. The ceremony itself included speeches by the mayor of the city, the park commissioner and the president of the local St Andrew's Society.[108] Nevertheless, the connection of Burns to democracy was made implicit by the decision by the organisers of the event to hold it on George Washington's birthday.

Burns, therefore, was still very prominent in sections of American cultural life in the early decades of the twentieth century. Clark McGinn has commented on Burns suppers being big, lavish affairs, with very formal proceedings, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[109] Formal events were held at prestigious venues such as Delmonico's restaurant in New York. The Burns Club of Atlanta notes that in attendance at their annual Burns "Dinner" in 1933 were the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, several other judges and the Governor of Georgia.[110] These opulent events in New York and Georgia were happening on the other side of the continent from California. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine, if they were at all representative of Burns suppers in America, that John Steinbeck would have identified with them. They would have certainly been anathema to his wife Carol and her left-wing, bohemian outlook. The Scottish poet, Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), a critic of Burns Suppers, described them as:

> witless lucubrations of the horde, of bourgeois "orators" who annually befoul his memory by the expression of sentiments utterly anti-pathetic to that stupendous element in him which ensures his immortality.[111]

[107] Michael E. Vance, 'Burns in the Park: A Tale of Three Monuments' in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* edited by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).
[108] *The San Francisco Call*, 23 February, 1908.
[109] Clark McGinn, *'Every Honour Except Canonisation': the global development of the Burns Supper: 1801 to 2009* (University of Glasgow: PhD Thesis, 2014).
[110] *Burns Chronicle* (1933), p. 127.
[111] Hugh MacDiarmid, *At the Sign of the Thistle: A Collection of Essays* (London: 1934), p. 168.

Rather than providing a critical input into the life and works of Burns, these socially conservative events often involved an almost cult-like celebration of the poet. DeLancey Ferguson wrote that, "The cult wants its oratory thick and slab. Anything quiet and restrained is a disappointment; anything critical is anathema."[112] However, the view of Burns clubs, and particularly the Burns Club of Atlanta, being exclusive is challenged by the club itself who maintain that, in addition to governors and college presidents, membership over the years has included plasterers, shopkeepers, engineers, lawyers, artists, salesmen and more:

> No organization has had a membership more representative of the leadership of Atlanta – not just the rich people, but people of many types and backgrounds.[113]

Certainly, the content of the addresses at Burns Nights at the Atlanta Club spoke passionately of the values of democratic America, "our land of the free, our home of the brave." The Honorable T.W. Reed's address on 25th January 1940 declares proudly, if a little jingoistically:

> This is a day that calls for the highest type of patriotism, that summons the faithful to the defence of the great privileges enjoyed by those who live beneath the Stars and Stripes of our beloved republic.[114]

The "great privileges" that must be defended are the principles upon which the nation was founded. That these principles are so unequivocally associated with the celebration of Burns illustrates how important the poet is seen as representative of democratic ideals. Regardless of whether the participants themselves can be described as possessing these ideals, the image of Burns being celebrated is undoubtedly that of democratic poet.

Beyond Burns clubs and faithful devotees of the poet, Burns's name was well-known among the general population. Reverend Harold A. Cockburn, in New York as a visiting minister from St. Michael's Church in Dumfries, wrote that:

> It is amazing how popular Burns is in America, how much the average American knows about him, and how many are able to quote some of his better-known lines.[115]

Cockburn recalls an invitation to speak at a Burns event in Central Park where around 10,000 people attended. The *New York Times* claimed in 1929 that, "Next to Scotland, the United

[112] DeLancey Ferguson, 'The Immortal Memory', *The American Scholar*, 5.4 (Autumn 1936), p. 445.
[113] *Burns Chronicle* (1995), p. 66.
[114] Hon. T.W. Reed, 'The Immortal Memory', address given (25 January, 1940) in *Burns Chronicle* (1941), p. 53.
[115] Harold A. Cockburn, 'Burns in America', *Burns Chronicle* (1945), p. 24.

States has led other countries in the recognition of Burns's genius."[116] Slightly earlier in the century, in 1911, an article in the Burns Chronicle stated that:

> Hardly even in Scotland itself has Burns been more lovingly studied and more highly lauded and appreciated than among the citizens of the great transatlantic Republic.[117]

The image of Burns was certainly widely used in advertising in the early-to-mid twentieth century. Advertisers were confident enough that people would know who he was, and that the image he portrayed was a positive one. "Robert Burns cigars" were advertised on the pages of various newspapers including the *Washington Post*, through the 1920s and 1930s. Harris Tweed is advertised alongside a quote from 'To a Louse' (1786):

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> To see oursels as others see us!
>
> (K 83)

Newspapers, in general, carry articles about Burns, from small local newspapers to huge national dailies. *The Ward County independent*, in North Dakota, for example, ran an article in 1912 with some thoughts on "Scotland's national bard, and that of humanity at large."[118] The article lamented that poetry in general was not as popular with young people at this time, or even, increasingly, with the old, and that fiction was all the rage.[119] Contrary to evidence shown elsewhere in this chapter which suggests that it was Burns's democratic views which had helped to maintain his popularity into the twentieth century, this article rather downplays that aspect, stating:

> The social and intellectual gulf between the classes and the masses is not now so great as it was in the eighteenth century and so the poet's repeated appeals to the democracy of his age have now lost their significance.[120]

Of course, Burns was not solely presented as a poet of democracy in this period, and other perceptions existed in America. As mentioned previously, the view of Burns often changed to suit current events or the prevailing national mood. A review in the *New York Times* of Franklyn Bliss Snyder's *The Life of Robert Burns* in 1932 is subtitled "Professor Snyder's Biography Defends Him From the Charge of Drunkenness."[121] The review of this

[116] *New York Times*, 27 January, 1929.
[117] A.C. White, 'American Appreciations of Burns', *Burns Chronicle* (1911), p. 83.
[118] *Ward County independent*, 8 February, 1912.
[119] Although Steinbeck was from California and not North Dakota, the general point is true and, if the author is suggesting this is a nationwide phenomenon, it certainly rings true for Steinbeck. He may (as will be seen in next chapter) have been exposed to Burns a youngster, but he was inspired to write fiction rather than poetry.
[120] *Ward County Independent*, 8 February, 1912.
[121] *New York Times*, 24 April, 1932.

authoritative and substantial biography focuses rather bizarrely on the one issue of Burns's drinking, something which had become an issue with biographers in the early nineteenth century but which took on added significance in 1930s America. The long-standing view of Burns as being overly fond of drink derives largely from the biography of the poet by Dr James Currie (1756-1805).[122] Taken in the context of its time, the review was written during Prohibition, the author is obviously relieved that Americans can happily celebrate Burns safe in the knowledge that he was not a drunk. Six years earlier, again during Prohibition, the newspaper had written:

> Thanks to Sir James Crichton-Browne, the most ardent prohibitionist need not hesitate in future to accept invitations to speak at Burns dinners. For that eminent surgeon has removed from the poet's reputation the stigma, so awkward to explain away, that he drank himself to death.[123]

This was in response to Crichton-Browne making a detailed rebuttal of the charge "by way of medical science" that drink had killed Burns.[124]

Such articles suggest that the early twentieth-century reception of Burns in the United States could be shaped by present concerns such as Prohibition, but newspaper articles from the period also reflected the recurring image of Burns as a fundamentally democratic poet. In 'Lovers of Burns To Raise A Shrine on Long Island', written in 1929, he is referred to as the "poet of Democracy" and this label is continually applied throughout the article. His poems "showed a strong sympathy for America's struggle for freedom and democracy."[125] It is particularly fitting that he should be honoured at this time, according to the article, because of the recent ratification of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in which signatory nations, including the United States, renounced the use of war to resolve disputes. Ten years later, again illustrating how views of Burns were adapted to suit contemporary events, the *New York Times* hailed the poet as "a hater of social injustice and as a man who would have disapproved of Hitler and Mussolini."[126] *Collier's* magazine appropriated his memory in a similar way in condemning the Kaiser at the close of the First World War.[127] As that conflict raged in 1916, the *Trenton*

[122] Dr James Currie, *The works of Robert Burns; with an account of his life, and a criticism on his writings* (Edinburgh: James Robertson, 1818).
[123] *New York Times*, 28 February, 1926.
[124] James Crichton-Browne, *Burns From a new Point of View* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926).
[125] *New York Times*, 27 January, 1929.
[126] *New York Times*, 25 June, 1939.
[127] *Collier's,* 63 (January, 1919). NB. See next chapter for fuller account.

Evening Times of New Jersey suggested that: "Scotchmen in the blood-soaked trenches of France and Flanders will fight all the more furiously because of their remembrance that they are the defenders of the land of Burns."[128] His image was, therefore, being appropriated to symbolise the struggle against perceived tyranny and oppression.

The twentieth-century world of North American entertainment was also inspired by Burns. The 1934 *Burns Chronicle* notes that a talk on "Burns and the Burns Country" will be broadcast from 250 radio stations across Canada and the United States. A British-made film shown in the United States, *The Loves of Robert Burns*, was released in 1930 with the opera singer Joseph Hislop in the lead role. Burns's sentimental song, 'Auld Lang Syne', was used at the end of Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's A Wonderful Life,* when George, played by James Stewart, begins to appreciate life once again. It is noteworthy to mention that it is used here in the context of a Christmas song, rather than a New Year song. It was not until Guy Lombardo and his band popularised the song as a New Year song that the tradition gradually began to take hold and "listening to Guy Lombardo and The Royal Canadians became a New Year's tradition in many homes and parties."[129] The song also featured in the 1940 film, *Waterloo Bridge*, which starred Vivien Leigh and Robert Taylor. Recording culture, too, in the early decades of the twentieth century drew inspiration from Burns. This chapter has discussed the Appalachian writer Jesse Stuart. Appalachian music, in particular fiddle music, also has its roots in Scotland. The fiddle tune 'Soldier's Joy', which Burns used for the first song of his cantata 'The Jolly Beggars', was a popular tune amongst Appalachian fiddlers of the twentieth century, such as Henry Reed (1884-1968).[130] Ronald D. Cohen has said that Woody Guthrie (1912-1967) deserves to be recognised "as a writer who belongs with Robert Burns and Walt Whitman in the awesome fraternity of great national poets."[131] Guthrie, who knew and admired the work of Burns, wrote an essay 'To That Man Robert Burns', in which he pointed out the similarities between himself and the Scottish poet and the deep connection he feels with him:

> Your words turned into songs and floated upstream and then turned into rains and drifted down and lodged and swung and clung to drifts of driftwood to warm and heat and fertilize new seeds. Your words were of the upheath and the down, your words were more from heather than from

[128] *Trenton Evening Times*, 25 January, 1916.
[129] *St. Albert Today*, 27 December, 2011.
[130] Library of Congress website: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/afc/afccc/soldiersjoy/> [accessed 7 November 2020].
[131] Ronald D. Cohen, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America's Songs* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 67.

> town. Your thoughts came more from weather than from schoolroom and more from shifting vines than from the book.[132]

In the piece, he reminisces about visiting Glasgow as a torpedoed seaman during the Second World War where he found inspiration in the work of Burns, an influence he took back with him to America. Whilst in Glasgow he also wrote a song about his time in the city, entitled 'Scotch Hills'. In the context of this thesis, it should be mentioned also that Guthrie was introduced to John Steinbeck by Will Geer, the actor and social activist, who also introduced Guthrie to socialists and Communists in California. The links between Steinbeck and Communism will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three. Guthrie himself was a huge influence on Bob Dylan, as was Burns. In 2008, Dylan stated that the lyric that had the greatest impact on his life was Burns's 'A Red, Red Rose'.[133] Dylan grew up in Duluth, Minnesota, and, although the Duluth Burns Club seems to have folded shortly before Dylan was born,[134] the prominent local figure and Burnsian Alexander G. McKnight was from Duluth. McKnight was an honorary president of the Burns Federation and Royal Chief of the Order of Scottish Clans at the time Dylan was growing up.

It would seem, therefore, that a commonly held view of Burns in America as a poet of democracy did largely continue into the early decades of the twentieth century. However, the prominent perception of the poet at any one time was largely dependent on the prevailing national mood and, on occasion, was adapted to suit contemporary events. In institutions like Burns clubs, and at events such as statue unveilings, although there was often an outward appreciation of the democratic aspects of the poet, there was an inherent socially conservative view of Burns that often was the prominent one. Therefore, as Sood has shown for the nineteenth century, it is true also that there is not one all-encompassing view of Burns in America in the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this thesis it would also be beneficial to determine whether there was a particular Californian, or West Coast, view of Burns. John Steinbeck, as a Californian,

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[132] Woody Guthrie, 'To That Man Robert Burns' (9 June, 1947), excerpt taken from Tara Zuk, 'The call of the Highlands: Jean Redpath, Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the Scottish Bard', *The Living Tradition* 130 (August, 2019).

[133] Tara Zuk, 'The call of the Highlands: Jean Redpath, Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the Scottish Bard', *The Living Tradition* 130 (August, 2019).

[134] Duluth is listed as a member club in 1935, but by 1936 is not mentioned in the *Burns Chronicle*; Dylan was born in 1941.

would have been more likely to have absorbed such an image of the poet. In the nineteenth century Walt Whitman said that Burns "would have been at home in the Western United States, and probably become eminent there."[135] One of the best-known Californian figures, the Scottish-born naturalist and writer John Muir (1838-1914) had a great love of Burns. The man largely responsible for the establishment of Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park, both in California, wrote a 1907 tribute to the poet, in which he talked about carrying a copy of Burns's works on his walks all over the world. Muir's tribute, written for the Burns Night celebrating the 148th anniversary of the poet's birth held in the Hotel Maryland in Pasadena, was read in Muir's absence. In it, Muir wrote about Burns's humanity, his works, his patriotism and his lasting universal appeal.[136] Muir's fellow Californian, John Steinbeck, shared his love of the Californian wilderness, speaking in awe in 1962 about Californian redwoods as "ambassadors from another time."[137] John Steinbeck had deep-seated roots in Monterey County, growing up in the county seat of Salinas, and many of his books reflect this connection. An article in the *Monterey Peninsula Herald* mentions a lecture by Dr Blanchard on the writing of Bret Harte (1836-1902) and his intense love of the California setting and, in particular, the redwood trees, and how "no one else has so excellently caught the spirit of adventure, hardihood, and essential manliness and chivalry of our early pioneers."[138] In later life, Harte left California and ventured to Europe, spending time living in Scotland. The article questions the future of literature in California and quotes Dr Blanchard, who seems to suggest, in all but one area, California is superior to Scotland:

> "A Scotch thistle is obviously inferior to a California poppy," said Dr Blanchard. "The bleak low hills and stunted beaches of Scotland pale into insignificance beside our lofty Sierras and our Olympian redwoods; yet see what Robert Burns and Walter Scott have done with the materials at hand."[139]

Although Californians thought of themselves as unique, and people moved westward from all over the country to "the Land of Milk and Honey, a place where anyone could go and begin life again"[140], there does not seem to have been a particularly distinct view of Burns that set it apart from the rest of the country. If anything, there is a particularly strong appreciation of

[135] Walt Whitman, 'Robert Burns as Poet and Person', *The North American Review* 143.360 (November, 1886), 427-435 (p. 427).
[136] 'Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot And Never Brought To Mind', in *The Pasadena Evening Star*, 26 January, 1907.
[137] John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America (London: Penguin Classics, 2000*).
[138] *Monterey Peninsula Herald*, 17 November, 1932, p. 3.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Parini, *John Steinbeck: A Biography*, p. 22.

Burns's perceived independence of spirit and personal freedom, spoken about by John M. Graham of Georgia, but also evident in newspaper articles and reports on Burns-related events in California. Such a view of Burns would have particular appeal for the people in this land of pioneers.[141]

This chapter has demonstrated the continuing popularity of Burns in the twentieth century across all levels of American society. The chapter has further shown that, although Burns's image was often adapted to fit the prevailing national mood at any one time, the single most important reason for his enduring appeal was the perception of him as democratic poet. The ubiquity of Burns, the fact he is known among the general populace and not just in the literary world, is demonstrated in the *New York Times* when an agricultural article entitled "War on Field Mice is kept up" begins with the sentence, "The mouse may be weak, timid and cowering, as described by Robert Burns…"[142] It is simply accepted that the readership of the newspaper will have a knowledge and understanding of who Burns is and, in particular, an awareness of the reference to the mouse.

[141] Newspapers such as the *San Francisco Call*, *San Jose Mercury*, *Los Angeles Herald* and others, via California Digital Newspaper Collection - https://cdnc.ucr.edu/. For example, the *San Francisco Call,* 30 January 1897, reports on an address at Golden Gate Park, in which Burns's "noble and independent spirit" is honoured.
[142] *New York Times*, 5 November, 1924.

Chapter 2

'Little Furry Creatures' – Burns's 'To a Mouse' imagery in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

> But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
> In proving *foresight* may be vain:
> The best laid schemes o' *Mice* an' *Men*,
> Gang aft agley,
> An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
> For promis'd joy!
>
> (K 69)

Any discussion concerning the influence of Robert Burns on John Steinbeck must spend time focusing on Steinbeck's 1937 novella *Of Mice and Men*. Its title taken from the penultimate verse in Burns's 'To a Mouse', it is the most obvious reference to the work of Burns by Steinbeck, and one which invites further investigation into the extent to which he was influenced by the Scottish poet. Although the thematic connection between Burns and Steinbeck is often referred to in relation to *Of Mice and Men*, particularly by Barbara Heavilin and Carol McGuirk,[143] the degree of influence Burns had on Steinbeck's artistic vision has yet to be explored in any real depth.[144] The purpose of the chapter is not to look solely at the allusions between the two works and to undertake a literary analysis, as has already been done by both Heavilin and McGuirk, but to search deeper for the origins of the connection. Rather than a detailed parallel reading of the two texts, the association of Steinbeck with Burns will be examined for the first time in a cultural and creative context. Where previously assumptions have been made as to the connections, this chapter will include information from the archival record in an attempt to evidence, where possible, the level of this influence.

A number of critics, including Barbara Heavilin and Susan Shillinglaw, believe that it was Steinbeck's wife, Carol, who suggested the title for Steinbeck's novella, Heavilin stating, "His first wife, Carol, who acted as an important editor and creative force in his life,

[143] Barbara A. Heavilin, ed, *Critical Insights: Of Mice and Men* (Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2017); Carol McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, Poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland', in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* edited by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

[144] For theoretical studies into what specifically constitutes transatlantic influence, see, for example: Marjorie Garber, 'Over the Influence', *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 4 (2016), pp. 731-750); Arun Sood, 'Burns, Whittier, and the "Rustic Bard of New Hampshire": Mediations in Transatlantic Reception and Influence*', Studies in Romanticism* 59:2 (2020), pp. 163-184.

suggested a better title for the book: *Of Mice and Men*."[145] Susan Shillinglaw agrees that Carol was responsible,[146] stating categorically that, "Originally entitled *Something That Happened*, the manuscript became *Of Mice and Men* when Carol came up with the title from a poem by Robert Burns, 'To a Mouse.'"[147] This does suggest a widely-held belief, or even acceptance, that Carol was responsible. However, as this issue is of such importance to the overall thesis, it requires further investigation.

It is certainly the case that Carol was a major influence on Steinbeck, a notable contributor to his work, through the late twenties and early thirties. As Shillinglaw says, Steinbeck was:

> Married to a woman who "willed" his searing social commentaries into being, who willingly served as researcher, typist, editor, and title-maker for two novels that would become the signature works of the Great Depression, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.[148]

Throughout their marriage, then, Carol had a deep influence on Steinbeck. She helped to shape his interests, his political outlook and also the themes he would later explore as a writer. When writing to friends, he would mention that "we" had been working on manuscripts. Funny stories that Carol brought home with her found their way into *Tortilla Flat* (1935).[149] She introduced Steinbeck to the work of her favourite writers, including Willa Cather,[150] who, as was discussed in chapter one, was an admirer of Burns. They were likewise both stirred by the writing, and political campaigning, of the socialist writer Upton Sinclair. Shillinglaw has further noted that Carol encouraged John to become more politically outspoken in his writing:

> Carol's more muscular social conscience spurred John toward political engagement. To a large extent, her political savvy became the catalyst for three books that are, for many readers, the signature works of Steinbeck's career: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).[151]

[145] Barbara A. Heavilin, ed, *Critical Insights:* Of Mice and Men, p. 47.
[146] Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage,* p. 82.
[147] Ibid., p. 176.
[148] Ibid., p. 164.
[149] Ibid., p. 82.
[150] Ibid., p. 46.
[151] Ibid., p. 140.

Steinbeck did indeed become more politically engaged during this period. Prior to a trip to Russia in 1937[152] he had been asked by a strike-organiser friend – whose story he had researched for *In Dubious Battle* – to write an article about sport. Steinbeck noted: "You know I'll do anything for this movement that makes sense. But for me to write about sports is insane."[153] Shillinglaw maintains that:

> What the trip to Moscow suggests, however, is that Steinbeck's commitment to the people's cause was not generic, was not solely artistic. He was a partisan – although the extent of his political engagement in 1937 and early 1938 is murky at best. He drew a curtain around his activism.[154]

Carol was the inspiration and the catalyst for much of this activism. Accusations of Communism followed Steinbeck through much of his career following the publication of his "Dustbowl Trilogy" of the thirties, of which *Of Mice and Men* is a part. However, it was Carol who actually joined the Communist Party in 1938 following their trip to Russia.[155] She later said she did it primarily to irritate Steinbeck's relatives and, by 1939, had become a Democrat. Nevertheless, it illustrates how Carol's radical politics had an effect on Steinbeck's personal and professional lives, also impacting on the public and official perceptions of him for decades to come. Moreover, Burns was a central figure to Soviet Russia and it is highly likely that the Steinbecks would have been aware of this during their visit. Steinbeck's perceived Communism and his political connections with Burns will be examined in more depth in the next chapter.

Samuil Yakovlevich Marshak (1887-1964) was a Russian poet, writer of children's literature and translator. He first translated the work of Burns in 1924, the decade before the Steinbecks' trip to the Soviet Union, and thereafter provided new translations for Soviet readers on a regular basis. As Natalia Kaloh Vid's work has illustrated, the Soviet state often adapted literary works in order to, among other aims, introduce foreign authors to the Soviet people as "exponents of the Communist regime".[156] It is apparent that the work of Burns appealed to Soviet ideology. For example, in order to mark the bicentenary of the birth of the

[152] Steinbeck himself said in *A Russian Journal*, his 1948 book recounting his 1947 trip to the USSR with the photographer, Robert Capa, that he had previously visited the country in 1936 (p. 18). However, in the 1999 edition of *A Russian Journal*, Susan Shillinglaw states in the 'Introduction' that the trip was, in fact, in 1937 (p.xvi).
[153] Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 193.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Natalia Kaloh Vid, <https://electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives107.htm>, ed by Frank R Shaw. [site accessed 24 February 2021].

poet, in 1959 the USSR became the first nation in the world to issue postage stamps containing Burns's image. This illustrates the level of recognition Burns had within the Soviet Union. Soviet children were taught the poems of Burns from at least the 1960s, as do Russian children to this day.[157] Marshak's translations played a major role in introducing Burns to the Soviet, and later, Russian people. However, the reason why he has become such an established figure is perhaps best explained by Rait-Kovaleva, who says that Burns is close to:

> All those, who love people, love their motherland and freedom, all those who defend peace and free labor, who struggle against the dark forces of war, slavery and hatred of mankind, which Burns struggled against in his immortal poetry.[158]

Notwithstanding the level of influence Carol had on Steinbeck around the time that *Of Mice and Men* was written, there was one other person in his life who had a similar effect. Ed Ricketts (1897-1948), the marine biologist, and Steinbeck shared many intellectual interests and would, for example, later collaborate on *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research* (1941). In the thirties, Steinbeck frequented Ricketts' lab and they would discuss a whole range of topics:

> Ricketts and Steinbeck would sit up late, discussing art, music, literature and philosophy as well as biology. What set Ricketts apart was his eclecticism: he loved classical music, especially Bach, Mozart and Gregorian chants, and he could talk about modern art with ease and delight; he read and studied philosophical works, such as Kant and Hegel, and he could quote Walt Whitman by the yard; he took the trouble to learn German so that he could read Goethe in the original.[159]

Jay Parini suggests, in fact, that Ricketts may have had a hand in persuading Steinbeck to change the title of his new novella from *Something That Happened*.[160] There is, however, no evidence that has come to light in extant correspondence between the pair that Ricketts suggested *Of Mice and Men* as an alternative.[161]

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[157] Information from Robert Burns Birthplace Museum [discussion 3 January 2020].
[158] Selections of Robert Burns. Trans. S. Marshak. 2 vols. (Moscow, 1963), I. 68. As quoted in Yang De-you, 'On Marshak's Russian Translation of Robert Burns', *Studies in Scottish Literature,* 22.1 (1987), p. 11.
[159] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography,* p. 137.
[160] Ibid., p. 229.
[161] This includes an online search of various US-based (East Coast and Texas) archives, as well as the book, *A Life in Letters.* Anticipated in-depth research of West Coast archives has not taken place, although basic online research has tried to identify anything relevant.

The pervasiveness of popular expression should also not be underestimated. It could be that Steinbeck got his title, not directly from his - or his wife or friend's - knowledge of the work of Burns, but via a second-hand route. The saying "the best laid schemes of mice and men" and variations on this have become proverbial in our culture. James M. Montgomery notes:

> Ever since we have adopted the beauty, the humor and the wisdom of Robert Burns as part of our own culture and our own idiom – often, even usually, without knowing the source in Scotland's ploughman poet. We lament "the best laid plans of mice and men"; we wish we could "see ourselves as others see us"; we declare "our love is like a red, red rose" and annually we bellow the question of whether old acquaintances should be forgot – and only occasionally wonder what the hell an "auld lang syne" might be.[162]

Was this equally the case in the America of Steinbeck prior to the publication of his novel? A search of the *New York Times* for the twenties and thirties produces several instances of the phrase being used proverbially. In a film review from 22 March 1930, entitled "The Screen; Warriors of the Clouds. Laughter and Love", the reviewer concludes:

> As a final thought he drops a copy of Shelley's poems on a sofa and is satisfied that he has overlooked nothing. But "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," as they do here.[163]

It would certainly have been difficult to avoid such references and it would be correct to say that Steinbeck certainly had at least an awareness of the work of Burns by the early thirties. Carol's influence in the decision over Steinbeck's title again seems crucial. Around the time of submission of the longer novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, in 1938, Steinbeck wrote about the origin of its title in a letter to his publisher, Pascal Covici:

> Did you like the title, or did Miss McIntosh tell it to you? It is *The Grapes of Wrath* from the battle hymn of the republic. Read the hymn and you will see how apt the title is. Carol's again. And [likes] the soft with the hard and the marching content and the American revolutionary content. Let me know how you like it.[164]

From this, it is apparent that Carol provided the title for *The Grapes of Wrat*h, and Steinbeck's use of "again" does hint that she may also have been responsible for the preceding *Of Mice and Men*. Although to which of his previous novels Steinbeck is referring

[162] Montgomery, 'How Robert Burns Captured America', p. 237.
[163] Mordaunt Hall, 'The Screen; Warriors of the Clouds. Laughter and Love', *New York Times*, March 22 1930.
[164] Letter to Pascal Covici, September 16, 1938, 'John Steinbeck Collection', from Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

is not actually specified, the evidence does point to Carol as being the title provider. In addition, *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed* has shown that Carol and John owned a copy of Burns's *Complete Poetical Works*, stamped with "This book belongs to Carol and John Steinbeck."[165] With Carol's name appearing first in the description, it does seem likely that the book may have originally belonged to her. Furthermore, Susan Shillinglaw has written that Carol's step-daughter confirmed to her that Carol came up with the title. The step-daughter was not herself present when *Of Mice and Men* was published, and there is no documentary proof conclusively showing this is the case, but Carol telling her directly that she was responsible does strengthen the argument.[166] If it is accepted that Carol was indeed the source for the quotation, can it be determined if her input built on an already-established connection Steinbeck had with Burns's work, or did he and Carol discover and develop their interest together?

For all that Carol and John owned a copy of Burns's works in the thirties, it could be argued that he was already well acquainted with the poems of Burns prior to meeting his wife. Steinbeck's family, for example, owned a copy of *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*.[167] Moreover, the author's biographer, Jay Parini, has stated that the Steinbeck family subscribed to "a bountiful assortment of periodicals, including *Youth's Companion*, *National Geographic*, *Century Magazine*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Collier's*."[168] A study of the content of these during his formative years has proven fruitful in discovering the theories and opinions to which the young Steinbeck and his three sisters were being exposed. There are articles which certainly suggest they played a part in influencing his outlook on the world, one in particular that will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.[169]

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[165] DeMott, *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books Owned and Borrowed*. Unfortunately, no date is given for this volume of *Complete Poetical Works*, making it unclear which edition it is.
[166] Susan Shillinglaw, email correspondence, 28 October 2019.
[167] The 'Family Library' collection, The National Steinbeck Center - https://www.steinbeck.org/archive/family-library/. This book is in the collection category of 'Steinbeck/Hamilton family books; signed/inscribed.' Most books in that collection cannot be tied to an individual, but were simply owned by the family, as a whole. The volume is inscribed "C A Steinbeck." The list of books on the website covers multiple categories, nearly half of which is just a family association: a Steinbeck or Hamilton family member owned the book. Who, when, or if it belonged to a specific individual can't be proven. The category in which this book belongs places it as having an association with a Steinbeck or Hamilton family member. However, its designation means it is unlikely to have belonged to John.
[168] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 27.
[169] I will examine Seymour Deming, 'This Distrust of Democracy', *Century Magazine,* Vol. XCIII, New Series: LXXI (November 1916 to April 1917).

With specific relation to Burns, there are frequent references throughout all the publications mentioned above. The *Youth's Companion*, for example, for the years 1912-1922, when Steinbeck would have been between the ages of ten and twenty, contains several mentions of Burns. Although there are no in-depth articles in the self-proclaimed "illustrated family paper"[170], the tone of discussions about Burns, and the frequency with which his name appears, assumes an awareness of the poet amongst the paper's readers. The *Saturday Evening Post* contains a long article from 1913 on "one of the greatest Burnsians in the country", Wully Smith.[171] *Collier's* published an article on 'The Harvard Classics' in 1915, when Steinbeck would have been an impressionable 13-year-old:

> Milton was the great poet of civil and religious liberty, Puritanism, and the English Commonwealth, and Burns was the great poet of democracy. The two together cover the fundamental principles of free government, education, and democratic social structure, and will serve as guides to much good reading on those subjects provided in the collection. The Harvard Classics from Homer to Tennyson will by itself give any appreciative reader a vivid conception of the permanent, elemental sentiments and passions of mankind, and of the gradually developed ethical means of purifying those sentiments and controlling those passions.[172]

Such a passage underlines the perception of Burns as a champion of democracy in the United States, as discussed in chapter one. Although we cannot say with certainty that Steinbeck read this article, we know his family subscribed to the publication and that, as a young teenager, he read voraciously.[173] The article is clearly encouraging readers to explore the works of, amongst others, Milton and Burns. Such a spirited recommendation for further study would likely have been attractive to the book-loving 13-year-old Steinbeck. An article commenting upon Burns's 160th birthday speculates on what may have transpired had Burns travelled, as planned, to the West Indies. It claims he "would certainly" have gone on to the States and "probably" gone to Benjamin Franklin in order to get his poems published. "What jovial cracks he and Ben would have had!"[174] This article places Burns very much in an American context and would have been appealing to an American readership. The article also laments the fact that Burns was not around during the recently-ended First World War, arguing that he could have been of benefit to the war effort "revising his 'Address to the Deil' to make it fit

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[170] Quote from an 1897 advertisement – <www.collectingoldmagazines.com> [site accessed 10 December 2020].
[171] *Saturday Evening Post,* 186:3 (1913: Oct 4 – Nov 8).
[172] 'What Shall We Read: The Harvard Classics?', *Collier's,* 56.1-7 (1915).
[173] Steinbeck would later have a professional association with *Collier's,* writing articles in 1952 for the magazine in his capacity as roving European editor-at-large.
[174] *Collier's*, 63 (January 1919).

the Kaiser."[175] This, as shown in the previous chapter, illustrates how the view of Burns in America was adapted to suit the national mood, and represents a changing image of the poet over time. It also shows the continuing relevance of Burns to America in a cultural context.

In *Century Magazine*, there are several mentions of Burns in general terms as well as an article on democracy by Seymour Deming which speaks of Burns and Walt Whitman in positive terms.[176] First published in 1881, *Century Magazine* became popular due to a successful series of articles about the American Civil War. The article by Deming, in which he effectively presents a strong defence of democracy, would have been very influential to Steinbeck, especially in the context of the central theme of one of his earlier novels:

> Your challengers of democracy are usually two: the frankly bitter Tory, who cannot see why hungry people should be so unreasonable as to complain when he has just had a square meal himself; and the intellectual, regretfully skeptic."[177]

As will be shown, this particular article helped frame Steinbeck's democratic values, specifically in relation to *In Dubious Battle* (1936). While impossible to evidence, it is highly likely that he encountered Burns within such discussions. The *National Geographic*, in a 1917 article entitled "Strong, Stalwart, Upstanding", states:

> Such Scottish types as this village blacksmith inspired Burns to philosophize:
> "Princes and lords are but the breath of kings;
> An honest man's the noblest work of God."[178]

Although this is a brief survey, it nonetheless illustrates that Burns was ubiquitous, at least within the periodicals to which the Steinbeck family subscribed. The message provided in the quotation, above, from Burns's poem 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', resonates as representative of the message in Steinbeck's writing throughout the thirties. The nobility of man, for example, and the desire of the migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath* to earn an honest day's work, and to continue their search for dignity and acceptance in the face of overwhelming adversity clearly chimes with Burns. Steinbeck humanises people like the Joad family and attacks the system, and wealthy landowners, who exploit and deride them.

[175] Ibid.
[176] Deming, 'This Distrust of Democracy.'
[177] Ibid.
[178] *National Geographic,* 32 (July – Dec 1917).

Steinbeck attended Stanford University on and off from 1919 to 1925, where he studied English, Creative Writing and Classics. University, however, was not a successful experience for him, at least from an academic point of view. His official record contained reports of missed classes, failed courses, readmissions and withdrawals, and he eventually left without completing his degree. As Jay Parini says:

> He was not a scholar, and he did not need a degree to pursue what interested him: writing. In the end, Stanford gave him plenty of time to read and think, to meet like-minded friends, and to develop as a writer.[179]

Notwithstanding the fact that his attendance record left much to be desired, it is still worthwhile to examine the curriculum in order to determine whether he was introduced to the work of Burns at Stanford. A study of the 'Announcement of Courses' for the years Steinbeck attended contains no specific mention of Burns.[180] There are courses which are described under the term 'literature of the world', where students were encouraged to undertake comparative studies upon literature from different countries. One of these is titled 'The 18th Century' and could conceivably have included a study of Burns, but no evidence has become available that mentions exactly what this course entailed.[181] This is not to say that Steinbeck did not discuss Burns at Stanford. He was involved with the English Club, a group of students and professors who would meet and discuss their writing. He would also reportedly sit for hours with his Stanford friends, such as Carlton 'Dook' Sheffield, Toby Street and Carl Wilhelmson, and argue about the merits of particular writers, including Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) and Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941).[182] Sheffield wrote a memoir on his friendship with Steinbeck, but he does not mention Burns at all when discussing their experiences at Stanford. He describes some of the classics that had been in the Steinbeck family home as his friend grew up - books by writers such as Plutarch, Herodotus, Cicero, Seneca, Malory, Gibbon, Dr Johnson – but, again, despite the family owning a copy of Burns's works, there is no specific mention of the Scots poet.[183]

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[179] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 38.
[180] 'University Bulletin: Announcement of Courses', Leland Stanford Junior University.
[181] Sources researched: 'University Bulletin: Announcement of Courses', Leland Stanford Junior University; online search of Stanford University Archives; *Sandstone & Tile* contains articles about Stanford history as well as news about Stanford Historical Society activities and the University Archives. Especially the articles: 'John Steinbeck at Stanford', by Gavin Jones, *Sandstone & Tile* (Winter 2020), 44.1; 'John Steinbeck and Stanford University: The Checkered Academic Career of a Future Nobel Laureate', by Margaret J. Kimball, *Sandstone & Tile* (Winter/Spring 2002), 26.1.
[182] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 50.
[183] Carlton A. Sheffield, *John Steinbeck, the Good Companion* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 49.

Another piece of evidence which may determine whether Steinbeck was aware of Burns relates to his hometown of Salinas, California, which inspired the setting of several of his stories. The library in the town, opened in 1909 when Steinbeck was seven years old, was one of approximately 2,500 libraries funded by Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919). Intriguingly, James M. Montgomery has said that in all the libraries he funded, Carnegie "placed a bust of Burns."[184] This would certainly suggest that the young Steinbeck would have at least encountered a representation of Burns as a figure of literary and cultural significance, if not necessarily the works of the poet. Susan Shillinglaw shows, by quoting Steinbeck's recollections of his and Carol's time in Pacific Grove, California in the 1930s, how the couple spent a great deal of time in the library during this period: "'For entertainment we had the public library, endless talk, long walks, any number of games,' John wrote thirty years later."[185] Founded in 1908, Pacific Grove Library was also Carnegie-funded and should, therefore, have had a bust of Burns for Steinbeck and Carol to encounter. However, Montgomery's follow-up survey into several Carnegie-funded libraries revealed little knowledge of these busts. In an article entitled 'Andrew Carnegie and his Library Burns Busts. How did they all disappear?', Ron Ballantyne reaches the conclusion that, "based on the foregoing, one can only conclude that the story about placing busts of Robert Burns in all libraries funded by Andrew Carnegie is an urban myth."[186] If this Carnegie Burns bust narrative is unreliable, there was and remains to this day a memorial to Burns in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Standing 20 feet in height, this memorial was unveiled in 1908, in front of a crowd of approximately 25,000 people.[187] Steinbeck would likely have been aware of this statue, being a regular visitor and sometime resident of San Francisco. As he said in 1962, in *Travels With Charley*:

> Once I knew the City very well, spent my attic days there, while others were being a lost generation in Paris. I fledged in San Francisco, climbed its hills, slept in its parks, worked on its docks, marched and shouted in its revolts. In a way I felt I owned the City as much as it owned me.[188]

[184] Montgomery, 'How Robert Burns Captured America', p. 243.
[185] Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 68.
[186] Ron Ballantyne, *Andrew Carnegie and his Library Burns Busts. How did they all disappear?*, Robert Burns Association of North America website <http://www.rbana.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Andrew-Carnegie-his-missing-Library-Burns-Busts.pdf> [site accessed 24 February 2021].
[187] 'Database of Public Memorials to Robert Burns Worldwide' - <www.robertburnsmemorials.arts.gla.ac.uk> [site accessed 24 February 2021].
[188] John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 150.

One further line of investigation pursued in terms of Steinbeck's inspiration for *Of Mice and Men* was into the work of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960). Like Steinbeck, Hurston was a writer of the Modernist period, and both wrote about the dispossessed in American society during – although not exclusively – the Depression years. Hurston published *Mules and Men* in 1935, just two years before *Of Mice and Men* appeared. Though the title *Mules and Men*, together with the approximation in date, is what first draws a comparison with Steinbeck, it is actually Hurston's 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, that can be compared thematically with *Of Mice and Men*. Joelle Moen has observed that:

> John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* both depict working class people, especially itinerant farmers, and their culture – the games, language, sociality, etc. At the end of each novel, a main character kills the person who embodies their dreams and is their soul mate.[189]

Therefore, though there are similarities in style and theme between the works of Steinbeck and Hurston, there is no evidence to suggest that Steinbeck was influenced by the title *Mules and Men* in such a way that he called his work after Hurston's novel. Rather, it is not until Hurston's later work that the similarities between the two authors become apparent.

While it is difficult to demonstrate evidence of Steinbeck's knowledge of Burns and any direct influence it may have had on him prior to his writing *Of Mice and Men*, the evidence of the family periodical subscriptions, the proverbial usage of Burns's phrase within society, together with his relationships with family and friends, do point to, at least, a degree of awareness that Steinbeck must have had of Burns. A closer comparison of the two literary works provides a different kind of potential evidence for the link between these two writers.

Burns, Steinbeck and Critical Analysis

If one focuses, to begin with, on Steinbeck's work after *Of Mice and Men*, there are glimpses of the influence of themes from 'To a Mouse' which suggest that Carol proposing the title was the beginning of his attraction to Burns. Susan Shillinglaw describes how, in *The Grapes*

[189] Joelle Moen, 'The Possibilities of the Grotesque in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', in *John Steinbeck and His Contemporaries*, ed by Stephen K. George and Barbara Heavilin (2007), p. 123.

of Wrath, Steinbeck has "Muley, Casy, and Tom cooking rabbit and looking backward and forward from a dismal present."[190] This has obvious connections with the last verse of Burns's poem:

> Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' *me*!
> The *present* only toucheth thee:
> But Och! I *backward* cast my e'e,
> On prospects drear!
> An' *forward*, tho' I canna *see*,
> I *guess an' fear*!
>
> (K 69)

There are further 'To a Mouse' overtones when Steinbeck uses imagery to portray Muley as acting nervous and twitchy, almost mouse-like. Steinbeck appears, therefore, to be building upon his knowledge of the Burns poem which he further develops in *The Grapes of Wrath*, his next major work. *Cannery Row*, published in 1945, contains an intriguing little chapter at the end of the novel which tells of a gopher in the prime of his life who has found "a perfect place" to build his gopher hole. He will make his home, store his food and "raise any number of families." Sadly, he cannot attract a female and, as Mimi Reisel Gladstein notes, "Predictably, in the Steinbeckian vision, and as we have learned over and over again, the best laid plans gang aft agley."[191] Therefore, Steinbeck returns to the Burnsian themes he explored in *Of Mice and Men.* The gopher could be viewed as representative of the gentle but lonely character of Doc, who has figuratively built his nest by establishing a respected position in the community, but cannot get a female companion to share it. Alternatively, it could represent Mack or one of his friends from the Flophouse. According to Jay Parini, these exuberant social rejects "represent the flotsam of society, cruelly treated and ignored." He goes on to say, "As Stanley Alexander has written, they are 'outcasts from a social world which has arrogantly and wrongfully denied its connections with and dependence upon nature.'"[192] Regardless of the veracity of these interpretations of which character the gopher represents, or whether it could be argued it is representative of all of mankind, it would be accurate to conclude that it symbolises plans gone wrong and thus resembles one of the core themes of 'To a Mouse', therefore demonstrating a continuation of Steinbeck's fascination with that particular poem of Burns.

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[190] Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 200.
[191] Mimi Reisel Gladstein, 'Edenic Ironies: Steinbeck's Conflicted Vision', *Steinbeck Review,* 11.1 (2014), 1-13 (p. 12).
[192] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 348.

Steinbeck critics have been less inclined to note these allusions in his later work, but they have, unsurprisingly, been more eager to discuss the thematic connections between Burns's poem and Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. There are certainly common themes which appear in the two pieces of writing. Prior to the name change, the title *Something That Happened* suggests similarities between the two works and conjures up images from 'To a Mouse'. Peter Lisca, for example, argues: "In this light, the ending of the story is, like the ploughman's disrupting of the mouse's nest, neither tragic or brutal, but simply a part of the pattern of events."[193] It was simply "something that happened". It could be argued that Steinbeck's original choice of title in itself nods to the event upon which Burns's poem reflects. However, it is also arguably the case that the change of title for the novel suggests that Steinbeck wished to make more of the content of 'To a Mouse', to emphasize the connection. Barbara Heavilin looks at Steinbeck's novella and attempts to explain why the author changed the title to the more apt *Of Mice and Men.* She claims that, as in 'To a Mouse', the story is "devoted to a theme of the fate of innocence in a world gone awry."[194] She explains that, "Like Burns and his mouse, the innocents in *Of Mice and Men* are likewise caught in a maelstrom of circumstances seemingly beyond their control."[195] In Burns's poem, the endeavours of the mouse are ultimately futile. As the foresight of the mouse, in preparing its nest for winter, has been in vain, Burns's foresight and planning for his own future has, likewise, been futile. As Snyder has observed, "the tragedy of the mouse has become the tragedy of Burns himself."[196] Nigel Leask, too, recognises the futility faced by both mouse and poet, whilst also placing the poem in the wider context of contemporary agricultural conditions:

> More precisely, before the poet discovers an image of his own fate in the mouse's ruin, its animal predicament is very gently anthropomorphized and translated into the contemporary context of agricultural clearance. The mouse which "cozie here, beneath the blast…thought to dwell" is "now …turn'd out, for a' thy trouble, | But house or hald, | To thole the Winter's sleety dribble, | An' cranreuch cauld!"[197]

[193] Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 139.
[194] Barbara A. Heavilin, '"the wall of background": Cultural, Political, and Literary Contexts of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*', *Steinbeck Review,* 15.1 (2018), p. 2.
[195] Ibid., p. 3.
[196] Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns,* p. 181.
[197] Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 166.

Andrew Noble emphasises how Burns's "life was haunted and controlled from childhood by the threat and terrible consequences of impoverishment"[198] and agrees with Leask about the wider context in which 'To a Mouse' was written: "He is one of the great late-eighteenth-century witnesses to the brutality and uncertainty of labor amidst the turbulence of land enclosure and industrial innovation."[199] The agricultural aspect is a theme throughout Steinbeck's writing. Similar land-related socio-political problems to those experienced by Burns, and which shape the direction of 'To a Mouse', are a feature of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The desire for land ownership is unrealistic in the face of the economic realities that exist for the bindlestiffs in 1930s America. George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* are victims of circumstance and of worsening migrant labour conditions in their own time. They move from job to job, never settling in one place, although that is their ultimate dream. Lennie, in particular, is an innocent, entirely dependent on George. Recurring dreams of owning a farm and living off "the fatta the lan'"[200] are never going to come to fruition.

The inclusion of mice by Steinbeck in his novella may in itself be strong evidence that he had Burns's poem in mind when he was writing it. John Seelye argues that:

> Lennie's proclivity for taking up little furry creatures in his hand seems to be a sardonic reference to the sentimental plowman in Burns's poem, given what happens to them as a result.[201]

However, this may not necessarily have been his intention from the start. Tom Barden suggests it may have been Carol's new title which "prompted him to enhance the part mice play in the story, or they may have been featured all along – we don't know".[202]

Heavilin also comments upon Burns's phrase from 'To a Mouse' of "Nature's social union", claiming it is a phrase which suggests "harmony, unity, oneness – an ideal interrelationship encompassing all living beings and a worldview that both Burns the poet and Steinbeck the novelist share".[203] However, classic interpretations of 'To a Mouse' point

[198] Andrew Noble, 'Wordsworth and Burns: The Anxiety of Being under the Influence', Carol McGuirk, ed., *Critical Essays on Robert Burns* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p. 52.
[199] Ibid.
[200] John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).
[201] John Seelye, 'Steinbeck and Sentimentality', Susan Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle, eds., *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck* (University of Alabama Press, 2002), p. 26.
[202] Tom Barden, 'Of Mice and Meaning in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men'*, p. 136.
[203] Heavilin, '"the wall of background": Cultural, Political, and Literary Contexts of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*', p. 2.

out that, as a farmer, Burns knows the ideas he invokes in the poem are not true. Thomas Crawford argues that Burns:

> is quite aware that "Nature's social union" embraces the relationships of hunter and hunted, of parasite and host. But he uses the concept of "social union" as a tool, in order to convey his sense of the pathos involved in man's relationship to the animals he destroys.[204]

The compassion of Burns is evident in the poem. Crawford continues:

> The lines "At me, thy poor, earth-born companion | An' fellow mortal!" are full of Burns's passionate sense of what men and animals still have in common – there is unity as well as opposition between them.[205]

Raymond Bentman further argues that the phrase "Nature's social union" itself is perhaps "inappropriate diction for a farmer, but it expresses, through its irony, Burns's contempt for abstract theodicies, for well-laid schemes."[206] "Harmony", "unity" and "oneness" are certainly words that can be applied to Steinbeck's writing, especially the period during the thirties when *Of Mice and Men* was written. They are all words that characterise Communism, where all property and wealth are communally owned in an essentially classless society. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Carol had strongly-held left-wing beliefs and ultimately became a member of the Communist Party in 1938. Therefore, Steinbeck, if perhaps not as actively involved in the movement as Carol, was certainly exposed to, and believed in, many of the same ideals. The relationship between Steinbeck and Communism will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, but it would be true to say that the 1930s was the pinnacle of Communist influence in America. Steinbeck's writing from a biological viewpoint, as well as a political viewpoint, can also be characterised by the terms harmony, unity and oneness. As James C. Kelley states:

> To some degree the continuing popularity of Steinbeck's writing may result from the fact that he and Ed Ricketts were far ahead of their time in understanding the evolutionary thread that binds together all living things.[207]

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[204] Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh: 1960), p. 165.
[205] Ibid., p. 166.
[206] Raymond Bentman, 'Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction' in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns,* ed by Carol McGuirk (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p. 86.
[207] James C. Kelley, 'The Global Appeal of Steinbeck's Science: The Animal-Human Connections' in *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck,* ed by Susan Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle (University of Alabama Press, 2002), p. 256.

Steinbeck's friendship with the biologist Ricketts sparked his lifelong interest in biology and ecology, and together they actively studied the associations between animal and human behaviour. According to Jay Parini, Steinbeck was in some ways:

> a founding father of modern ecological thinking, viewing all parts of nature as a united whole and recognizing that the existence of any single part is intricately dependent upon all other parts. He did not want to study man outside his natural setting, understanding that even the smallest of human interactions are, on some level, governed by the individual's place within his or her physical context.[208]

Carol McGuirk, too, claims that, in relation to *Of Mice and Men*, "allusions to Burns's 'To a Mouse' go well beyond the title."[209] In relation to these themes of harmony, unity and oneness, she argues:

> The novel, like the second stanza of Burns's poem, considers "Man's dominion" as a disruptive force that shatters "Nature's social union." Yet in Steinbeck, "Nature" is represented by, among other things, childlike Lennie, who kills without realizing what he does. George discovers that he, too, is a killer: he shoots Lennie even though he sees their bond as his remaining link to humanity itself.[210]

This shattering of "Nature's social union", the breaking of a bond between humankind and nature, is a theme Steinbeck revisits and develops in many of his novels. Barbara A. Heavilin has written about this in the context of *The Grapes of Wrath*. She points to the account of Casy, for example, after spending time in the hills, where he says, "There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that thing was holy."[211] However, as Heavilin points out, it is apparent that "a bond has been broken between humans and the earth."[212] Steinbeck thought of animals, humans and the land as part of a continuum of life, "sharing both nobility and biology."[213] He spent time with Ed Ricketts researching the ecology of coastal waters in California. In 1940, the pair embarked on a marine expedition in the Gulf of California, which resulted in *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*, published the following year. Steinbeck's interest in the relationship between humans and animals is also apparent in his correspondence. For

[208] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 5.
[209] McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland', p. 182.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Barbara A. Heavilin, 'A Sacred Bond Broken: The People Versus the Land in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Steinbeck Review,* 14.1 (2017), 23-38 (p. 26).
[212] Ibid., p. 27.
[213] Kelley, 'The Global Appeal of Steinbeck's Science: The Animal-Human Connections', p. 256.

example, in a letter of 1948 to his friend Bo Beskow, Steinbeck explains his excitement at spending time with his sons that summer: "I shall rent a boat and we will look at the little animals on the shore and I will let them look through microscopes, and we may even go camping in the mountains."[214] In a letter to Beskow the following year, again in anticipation of getting back to nature with his sons, he writes: "As much as possible they are going to be responsible for their own actions. They are going to associate with men and animals and they are going to be treated with respect."[215] His empathy with the natural world, according to his biographer Jackson Benson, can be attributed to "a special relationship he developed with nature... Over and over again in looking back on his childhood, Steinbeck uses such words as 'secret,' 'special,' and 'magical'" in reference to the natural world."[216] Moreover, his attraction to the natural world, and his fascination with the connections and relationships within it, developed and grew through his friendship with Ed Ricketts.

Raymond Bentman explores Burns's use of Scottish diction in, among other poems, 'To a Mouse'. He argues that the use of particular Scots words in relation to the mouse helps Burns to convey human emotions to its plight:

> "Cowrin" conveys, in both Scottish and English, the state of fear and the physical position assumed in fear, but in Scottish it can refer to the normal squatting position of an animal. Hence the word both conveys the continuity of physical state and emotional sensation, and allows the farmer to attribute a human reaction to the animal without becoming unconvincingly imaginative. "Bickering" in Scottish means "hastening" but also carries the English "fighting", "squabbling", "brawling", and thus conveys antagonism as well as fear in the mouse. "Breastie", by its diminutive form, conveys some of the affection of the farmer but also gives the mouse human implications, both physical and emotional, by virtue of the breadth of meaning of the word, while its rhyme with "beastie" recalls that the mouse's human qualities do not make it human.[217]

Thomas Crawford has also commented upon this stylistic humanising of the mouse by Burns, to the point that:

> we pity her as we would pity our own mother if we saw her deprived of her home and unable to find another, either because of natural disaster or social

[214] Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds., *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 341.
[215] Ibid., p. 354.
[216] Benson's words quoted in article by Matt Reimann, 'John Steinbeck the Environmentalist: Writing and Nature', on www.bookstellyouwhy.com, Feb 24th 2015.
[217] Bentman, 'Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction', p. 86.

> oppression. The mouse becomes more than any animal; she is a symbol of the peasant, or rather of the "poor peasant", condition.[218]

As well as a stylistic device, Burns's humanising of the mouse is also representative of his genuine feelings of empathy towards his fellow living beings. Demonstrating stylistic similarity with the Scots poet, Steinbeck reflects directly on his own tendency to attribute humanlike qualities to animals in 1941's *Sea of Cortez*:

> It is difficult, when watching the little beasts, not to trace human parallels. The greatest danger to a speculative biologist is analogy. It is a pitfall to be avoided – the industry of the bee, the economics of the ant, the villainy of the snake, all in human terms have given us profound misconceptions of the animals. But parallels are amusing if they are not taken too seriously as regards the animal in question, and are downright valuable as regards humans.[219]

Thus, Steinbeck, like Burns before him, recognised the value of attributing human qualities to animals. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck reverses this creative device and describes his human characters in terms of their animal qualities. Thus, Lennie has an animalistic nature: he is big, strong and bear-like, yet unable to look after himself and as helpless as a puppy. His outlook is one of innocence, his dreams represented by rabbit and mice imagery. The description of his companion, George, is almost mouse-like, "small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features."[220]

Both Burns and Steinbeck are associated with sentimentalism. Often, more so in the case of Steinbeck, they have been criticised for their overuse of sentimentality.[221] Burns's life, as Carol McGuirk has discussed, coincided with the rise of the sentimental movement. "References in Burns's letters and poems show that he was well read in sentimental fiction and poetry."[222] The term "sentimental", at this time, began as a fashionable expression and only later acquired its negative connotation. Sentimentality was seen as a representation of a person's morality rather than a weakness. Critics have convincingly argued that Burns's sense of sympathy derived from his knowledge of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral*

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[218] Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p. 166.
[219] John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts, *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), Chapter 11.
[220] John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 4.
[221] Although it is difficult to compare such criticisms in writers who lived 150 years apart. Indeed, sentimentalism was not viewed as a negative critical term in Burns's day, but, rather, was a popular movement. Nevertheless, both have, more recently, received criticism for their seemingly overt sentimentalism.
[222] Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (University of Georgia Press, 1985), p.xxiv.

Sentiments (1759), in which he proposed that compassion is a universal sentiment.[223] Poems such as 'To a Mouse' use this idea of projecting emotions onto a neutral object. Nigel Leask has argued, also, that such sympathy was an essential part of Burns's existence as a farmer:

> Burns's relationship to the animal world was both instrumental and sentimental: stockbreeding and the rationalization of the animal economy were essential elements of agricultural improvement, yet poet Burns knew that animals were living creatures and not just commodities, and as such demanded care and compassion.[224]

Thomas Crawford has shown that Robert Fitzhugh considered the sentimentality in both 'To a Mouse' and 'To a Mountain Daisy' to "reek with over charged benevolence and carefully calculated appeals to our tender feelings."[225] Crawford himself, however, finds this judgement unfair, at least in the case of 'To a Mouse'. He argues that, "The daisy poem is artificial, second-rate, perhaps even insincere, whereas 'To a Mouse' is charged with a genuine and intense emotion."[226] David Daiches argues that 'To a Mouse' displays charm and vigour as well as being technically accomplished, and agrees that Burns's comparison of the plight of the mouse with his own circumstances "is neither forced nor sentimental, and the gap between the world of mice and that of men is bridged by a friendly compassion."[227] Therefore, interpretations of 'To a Mouse' have, with a few exceptions such as that of Fitzhugh, tended to view the compassion and sentimentality in the poem as being genuine rather than forced. Burns's compassion is apparent by the very fact that the speaker addresses the mouse directly, thus empathising with its pain and terror.[228] Tom Barden argues that Burns "regards the mouse as a 'fellow mortal' – that is, although both mice and human are alive now, both must face death."[229]

Steinbeck has faced similar criticism of over-sentimentality. Writing in a different period from Burns, with different contemporary perceptions of the term "sentimental", Steinbeck nevertheless displayed a humanist philosophy in his writing not dissimilar to that of Adam Smith in the eighteenth century. Jennifer Williamson has shown, with particular reference to *The Grapes of Wrath*, how Steinbeck "expanded the boundaries of proletarian

[223] Craig Smith, *Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).
[224] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland*, p. 145.
[225] Robert T. Fitzhugh, ed., *Robert Burns, His Associates and Contemporaries* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), p. 14.
[226] Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p. 164.
[227] David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (London: 1966), p. 151.
[228] Barden, 'Of Mice and Meaning in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men'*, p. 136.
[229] Ibid.

sentimentalism by offering a new model of the workingman of feeling."[230] Contemporary reviews of his novella *Of Mice and Men* were largely positive, with a nod to his poetic instincts:

> But the cycle of friendship, even in tragedy, remains unbroken. And in the course of his swift-moving tale, Mr Steinbeck gives us a holiday pageantry of portraits in toil, in men's passions and repressions, in workers' dreams and devilments, told with a poet's eye to sounds and silences which makes his book a memorable thing indeed, and something at last to cheer about.[231]

However, the charge of sentimentalism is apparent in some reviews, with the *American Review* commenting that "surely no more sentimental wallowing ever passed for a novel, or had such a welcome, as this sad tale of a huge half-wit and his cowboy protector!"[232] Richard E. Hart has reflected on some of these accusations of sentimentality:

> Perhaps the most famous allegation of that kind came from Alfred Kazin in his definitive study, *On Native Grounds*. Kazin sharply attacked *Of Mice and Men* for its sterile "moral serenity" that led to the "calculated sentimentality" of the story. Edwin Berry Burgum echoed Kazim when he wrote that Steinbeck "swung in his various novels from the extreme of a deep and legitimate admiration for working people to that in which all values are paralyzed in the apathy of the sentimental. Similarly, John S. Kennedy stated that Steinbeck "can be acutely sensitive and true for a chapter, then embarrassingly sentimental and cheaply trite."[233]

Hart argues, however, that "Steinbeck believed that honest and true literature was all about trying to understand human beings – what makes them up and what keeps them going."[234] Steinbeck's compassion can be seen to have derived from living through the Great Depression, from experiencing first-hand what life was like travelling for work during the time he was in and out of university. He met characters like George and Lennie, bindlestiffs moving around the country going from job to job. During the period Steinbeck was a young man, most of California's crops were harvested by itinerant workers. They travelled from farm to farm looking for work, carrying their blanket rolls, or "bindles", on their backs. As Susan Shillinglaw explains:

> One study concluded that about twenty-five percent were feeble-minded,

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[230] Jennifer A. Williamson, *Twentieth-Century Sentimentalism: Narrative Appropriation in American Literature* (Rutgers University Press, 2013), p. 91.
[231] Charles A. Wagner, 'Books' in *New York Mirror*, 24 February 1937, p. 25.
[232] Dorothea Brande Collins, 'Reading at Random', *American Review,* 9 (April 1937).
[233] Richard E. Hart, 'Moral Experience in *Of Mice and Men*: Challenges and Reflection', *Steinbeck Review,* 1 (Fall 2004), p. 31. He quotes: Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (1942), p. 309; E.W. Tedlock, Jr & C.V. Wicker (eds), Steinbeck and His Critics (1957), p. 104; p. 120.
[234] Hart, 'Moral Experience in *Of Mice and Men*: Challenges and Reflection', p. 42.

> forced out on the road. To be a farmworker was to be among California's dispossessed, a powerless, degraded, ill-paid fraternity.[235]

Salinas, the town in which Steinbeck grew up, was one of California's richest agricultural valleys. Steinbeck's work on various ranches during the 1920s, such as those owned by Spreckels Sugar in the Salinas Valley, provided him with ideas for his fiction. For example: the Mexican workers he toiled alongside inspired characters from *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*;[236] and an episode involving a huge itinerant worker who killed a ranch foreman inspired the character Lennie from *Of Mice and Men*.[237] Steinbeck's compassion, therefore, was a long-standing trait, one that he had attained long before he wrote *Of Mice and Men*. It may be that the themes about which he wrote that show similarity to Burns were as a result of their shared outlook on life which the two writers developed independently, rather than any direct influence from the Scottish poet. Carol McGuirk looks at Steinbeck's compassionate portrayal of George and Lennie and argues that:

> Steinbeck's characters try to live up to Burns's imperative of human kindness; this is evident in George's years of tending to Lennie and in Lennie's dim appreciation of soft and helpless creatures like mice, rabbits, and puppies.[238]

Thus, it is Steinbeck's own inherent kindness, and tendency towards the sentimental, characteristics that he shared with Burns, that led him to write about similar themes as the poet, and to imbue his characters with those same qualities.

One further connection between Steinbeck and Burns is their link to William Wordsworth (1770-1850). Barbara Heavilin has written about the comparisons between Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and the work of Wordsworth, especially 'The Idiot Boy'. She argues that:

> As Wordsworth asserts, "relationship and love" are qualities that all human beings in all places and at all times have shared, and George and Lennie are largely defined by their brotherly relationship to one another.[239]

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[235] Susan Shillinglaw, 'Introduction' to *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.xii.
[236] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography*, p. 49.
[237] Shillinglaw, 'Introduction' to *Of Mice and Men*, p.xiii.
[238] McGuirk, 'Burns and Aphorism; or, Poetry into Proverb: His Persistence in Cultural Memory Beyond Scotland', p. 183.
[239] Mimi Gladstein, review of *John Steinbeck's* Of Mice and Men*: A Reference Guide* by Barbara Heavilin, in *Steinbeck Studies,* 16.1-2 (Spring 2005).

If, as it appears, Steinbeck was influenced by the work of Wordsworth, then it is plausible he was drawn also to the sentimentalism of Burns which Wordsworth so admired. Andrew Noble, in an article on Wordsworth and Burns, quotes Wordsworth's comments from a discussion with James Patrick Muirhead:

> Of Burns he spoke long, energetically, and in the highest style of language… He thinks that Burns in his own sphere, is unrivalled, and that as raising himself into such fame by the study of the objects which constantly met his eye in his daily life he is worth of all praise.[240]

Furthermore, Nigel Leask has shown how Wordsworth acknowledged the debt he owed to Burns with regard to his own poetry:

> Wordsworth generously acknowledged the extent of Burns's influence in his poem 'At the Grave of Burns', written in the habbie stanza; 'whose light I hailed when first it shone, | And showed my youth | How verse may build a princely throne | On humble truth'.[241]

Wordsworth, therefore, was clearly a great admirer of Burns and his representation of ordinary life. In the case of Steinbeck, Barbara Heavilin expands upon Steinbeck's appreciation of Wordsworth, and the influence the English poet had on him in one particular respect:

> Steinbeck's intentions in writing his novel parallel to the British Romantic William Wordsworth's stated purpose in Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: to write about "humble, rustic people, using their own language or dialect."[242]

This was indeed a feature of Steinbeck's writing, most evidently in *Of Mice and Men* and in *The Grapes of Wrath*, as it famously was with Burns throughout his life. Thomas Crawford, for example, argues that, "Burns's poems can be arranged in series according to the number of specifically Scottish linguistic features they contain."[243] Crawford categorises them as: poems written in "English English", which do not differ from standard English; poems written wholly or partly in Scots English or Anglo-Scots, as in 'To a Mouse'; a Scots vernacular literary language "that was not the spoken language of any particular area…but rather General Scots"[244]; regional dialect proper, "the speech of Ayrshire and the South West, as distinct from that of lowland Scotland as a whole."[245] Thus, Burns, like Steinbeck, was concerned with authentically representing the rustic language of the people of whom he

[240] Andrew Noble, 'Wordsworth and Burns: The Anxiety of Being under the Influence', p. 52.
[241] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland*, p. 293.
[242] Barbara Heavilin, *John Steinbeck's* Of Mice and Men*: A Reference Guide* (Praeger Publishers, 2005).
[243] Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p.xi.
[244] Ibid., p. 12.
[245] Ibid.

wrote.[246] In terms of locality, Burns wrote enthusiastically about his attachment to Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire, but as can be seen from his tours across Scotland in the late 1780s, he also saw himself as a national bard. Similarly, Steinbeck's name is inextricably linked to California, with many of his most famous novels set in his home state. However, in later works such as *Travels with Charley* (1962) and *America and Americans* (1966), Steinbeck offered a representative view of the nation as a whole and, in effect, became a voice of America.

Therefore, it seems clear that at the time of writing *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck would have had at least an awareness of, and possibly more than a passing interest in, the work of Burns. He would have encountered him in the publications he read in his family home in Salinas, discussed the work of contemporaries - and possibly Burns himself - with professors, friends and acquaintances at Stanford, and he and Carol owned a copy of Burns's *Complete Poetical Works*. Notwithstanding the probability that it was Carol who provided the Burns-related title for his novella, the several links between the two works, as well as the shared sentimentalism and compassion displayed within them, illustrate that Steinbeck knew well the themes of 'To a Mouse' at the time he was working on *Of Mice and Men*; themes he would return to in succeeding novels, as shown, such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row*. Moreover, both Steinbeck and Burns had a propensity for giving voice to the common man and writing in the language of ordinary folk. The next chapter examines this shared characteristic in greater detail by analysing the politics of both writers and considers whether Steinbeck's knowledge of the poet played a role in shaping the American author's own political ideology.

[246] For a fuller discussion on this, see: Murray Pittock, '"The real language of men": Fa's Speerin? Burns and the Scottish romantic vernacular', in Sergeant, D. and Stafford, F. (eds.) *Burns and Other Poets* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 91-106.

Chapter 3

'In Dubious Battle' – The politics and political controversies of Burns and Steinbeck

As discussed in the previous chapters of this study, an important reason for the popularity of Robert Burns in America during the period of John Steinbeck's youth and early writing career was the perception of him as poet of democracy. That Burns was proclaiming democratic ideals at a time when most people did not have a vote, and when support for democracy itself was viewed as being dangerous, resonated with the American public; even more so when it is considered that one of the conflicts in which his country was engaged, and about which he was outspoken, was the democratic ideals coming out of the emergent American nation.[247] Robert Crawford has written how "Burns's political instincts developed out of a sense of social inequality."[248] This was not the only impetus for his early political engagement. He also had a romantic, idealistic viewpoint in relation to history. His early heroes were rebellious figures such as Hannibal and William Wallace[249] and he maintained a sympathy and admiration for the Jacobite cause.[250] On a window of an inn in Stirling in 1787, he scratched:

> Here Stewarts once in triumph reign'd,
> And laws for Scotland's weal ordain'd;
> But now unroof'd their Palace stands,
> Their sceptre's fall'n to other hands;
>
> (K 166)

Burns then proceeded, in the same poem, to call the Hanoverians "an idiot race".[251] With this romantic view of his own country's history, he naturally felt drawn to the image of the American rebels in their own fight against the oppression of the Hanoverian monarchy, as well as to their wider democratic ideals. Burns's democratic beliefs and his championing of social equality are obvious in his poetry and songs, perhaps best exemplified, for example, in lines such as: "The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor| Is king o' men for a' that." (K 482). Crawford has argued that, through such work, he developed "into the bard not just of Scotland but of democracy itself."[252]

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[247] Crawford, *The Bard,* p. 146.
[248] Ibid., p. 150.
[249] Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns,* p. 43.
[250] Albeit as a symbol of national pride rather than any belief in monarchy.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Crawford, *The Bard,* p. 150.

John Steinbeck was exposed to democratic ideals from a young age. As already mentioned in chapter two, his family subscribed to various periodicals, including *Youth's Companion*, *Century Magazine* and *Collier's*. The Steinbeck children were encouraged to read, and John and his three sisters immersed themselves in a multitude of cultural and historical articles. One of these publications was *Century Magazine,* which began in the late nineteenth century as an evangelical Christian publication and became popular initially by taking a predominantly conservative viewpoint on issues. The magazine also promoted American patriotism and glorified national historical figures, thus introducing the young Steinbeck to such heroes, just as Burns's reading from a young age introduced the poet to Scottish figures like Wallace and Bruce. However, the magazine developed over time to appeal to a wider readership. Despite its conservative leanings and opposition to socialism, it occasionally allowed dissenting viewpoints. In an article from 1917, Seymour Deming, the pen name of Junius Lucien Price (1883-1964), wrote a defence of democracy which he felt was under attack from those who held the levers of power; that amongst the better off in society, there was a feeling that democracy as espoused by the founding fathers was a nuisance:

> In a time when, by the democratization of government, the moneyed class is losing its money, and the intellectual aristocracy, by the democratization of education, is losing its prestige, is it any wonder that the twain unite in a distrust of democracy?[253]

The article then proceeds to explain why the distrust of democracy is natural: democracy represents a form of government which threatens the position of those who hold the power: "They reason, just as oligarchs have always reasoned, that oligarchy is better off for society because it is better for *them.*"[254] The nature and style of many of Deming's arguments are reflected in Steinbeck's novels of social conscience of the 1930s. Deming identifies the challengers of democracy as the same political class who would deny the poor and the hungry, and the author attacks their lack of compassion. This reflects the position of the Growers' Association, who manipulate the workers for their own ends in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936). The Growers' Association represents the ruling classes, the holders of power in the community who see no need for democracy. As Deming says: "[...] we need hardly wonder that men of business should distrust a system which is now aiming at the

[253] Deming, 'This Distrust of Democracy'.
[254] Ibid.

rescue of the most pitiable victims of the existing order."[255] Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* highlights the plight of those at the bottom of society, and the need for greater democracy in the supposed "land of the free". Deming goes on to specifically mention immigrants in his article; notably the manipulation of this group of workers and objections to their enfranchisement. He argues that this is an illogical position to take as the American nation was built on the backs of refugees. To illustrate his point, Deming references the similar fear and distrust of, for example, early Quaker settlers in the seventeenth century, as well as of Irish immigrants to Boston in the nineteenth century. However, Deming states that this fear was without basis and should not be viewed as a valid argument against democracy. The economic migrants in Steinbeck's novels of the thirties suffer the same treatment as the immigrants as described by Deming, and are similarly kept down by the anti-democratic actions of the oligarchs, most evidently in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Deming further considers the argument of those opposed to democracy "that the modern militant democracy of the working-class is out principally for the loaves and fishes."[256] He treats this argument, that the working class is simply interested in material objects, succinctly and with disdain: "It is. Naturally. Having been underfed for centuries, it would be strange if it were not."[257] Encapsulated in the argument for democracy, Deming argues, is a desire for greater access for everyone to the essentials of survival, such as the availability of sufficient food. In both *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's workers are often quite literally starving. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), this is best exemplified by the condition of the workers in the migrant camps and, in the last scene, when Rose of Sharon offers the starving young man her breast milk.[258] Steinbeck uses the main protagonist of *In Dubious Battle* (1936), Jim, to explain how the landowners exploit the hunger and desperation of the workers to enhance their own profits:

> Women work all day, men work all day; and the owner charges three cents extra for a can of beans because the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries.[259]

In a different article in the same edition of *Century Magazine*, the case for better treatment of ordinary workers is further enhanced:

> A well-fed, self-respecting, healthy workman can do more work than an under-nourished, servile workman. If the employer wants a good product

[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 30.
[259] John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), Chapter 5.

> and plenty of it, he must pay a living wage.[260]

Thus Steinbeck, through his reading, was becoming aware of the increased demand, in both Britain and America, for better working conditions for ordinary people, and the fact that the masses were increasingly prepared to take direct action in order to achieve this.

That Deming's article on democracy was an influence for Steinbeck is enhanced further by its reference to striking workers. Deming describes the following conversation with acquaintances who were reluctant to change the system:

> During a terrific strike which was shaking the floors and rattling the windows of many a stately town house, it appeared impossible to convince polite acquaintances (in said town houses) that there could be any good in the strike-leaders. They were self-seeking demagogues, disturbers of the peace, desperate characters, dangerous citizens, unscrupulous knaves, lawless agitators who ought to be shot down like mad dogs – well, the usual line.[261]

This certainly matches the view of the strike leaders held by the landowners and even the local townsfolk – whipped up by the negative propaganda against "reds" – in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle.* In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Casy is murdered by a group of men who fear his role as strike leader. The position of Deming's acquaintances softens when they hear the story of a Yorkshire strike leader who provided relief for the destitute. He worked long days, including delivering two speeches a day, although prior to his role as strike organiser he had never made a speech. As Deming said: "Life had taken him by the scruff of his neck and pitched him into this struggle."[262] The description of this weaver is comparable with Jim, the young protagonist of *In Dubious Battle,* who is similarly pitched into the struggles of "the Party". He is on a journey of self-discovery of his leadership abilities. Having not made a speech until the climax of the novel, his mentor, Mac, finally allows him to address the workers:

> Jim sprang up. "You're damn right I can do it. I'm near choking, but I can do it." His face was transfigured. A furious light of energy seemed to shine from it.[263]

However, he is interrupted and thus denied this opportunity just before he meets his death. Steinbeck thus shows the strike workers in a more humane light, as Deming had done by his

[260] Arthur Gleason, 'The Social Revolution in England', *Century Magazine,* XCIII, New Series: LXXI (November 1916 to April 1917).
[261] Deming, 'This Distrust of Democracy.'
[262] Ibid.
[263] John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), Chapter 15.

humanising depiction of the Yorkshire weaver. Notably, Deming proceeds to tell his acquaintances about how the weaver would read Robert Burns and Walt Whitman to his comrades. On hearing this, the assembled company would relax further. Deming concludes:

> It is merely creditable to the human sympathies of gentlefolk that they can conclude from Burns and Whitman that a strike-leader may have something human about him, after all.[264]

Thus, even conservative-minded people at the time Steinbeck was growing up, with a natural distrust of those within society who sought greater democracy, would soften their views on those they considered agitators if it was shown that these agitators could quote Burns. This further illustrates how universally acceptable Burns's perceived brand of democracy was in America at the time. The article, therefore, is useful in highlighting Steinbeck's views of democracy, how they were formed and how he would use these in his great social novels of the thirties.

It is also worth remembering, as discussed in the previous chapter, that Whitman was later to become an influence on Steinbeck.[265] It is possible that the Deming article introduced Steinbeck to the work of both Whitman and Burns. The article also serves to demonstrate the universal appeal of Robert Burns: how his work was used by strike leaders to galvanise the workers and at the same time was respected and admired by those at the opposite end of the social spectrum. Deming's conclusion is itself evocative of 1930s Steinbeckian thinking:

> To distrust democracy is to distrust great nature herself, is to think ill of the mother that bore us, is to doubt the very soil out of which springs all this divine and wondrous life. I am not concerned with proving this. It *is*. No proof can strengthen, no question shake it. I am merely concerned with pointing out certain absurdities and impoverishments of disbelief.[266]

For example, in writing *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck does not simply tell readers what they should feel. As Warren French has noted: "He [Steinbeck] sought – as he often argued – to promote understanding through his work, not to provide sentimental self-gratification."[267] Furthermore, Deming grounds the belief in democracy in a belief in nature itself, in the very

[264] Deming, 'This Distrust of Democracy.'
[265] For example, Jay Parini mentions how Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935) was influenced by Whitman. See - Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography,* p. 197.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Warren French, 'Introduction' to *In Dubious Battle* by John Steinbeck (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.xxv.

soil out of which life springs, which is comparable with Steinbeck's nature symbolism, evident in much of his work such as the imagery he utilises in *Of Mice and Men*.

The politics of both Burns and Steinbeck are often tied to the landscape. The subject of agriculture and improvements was a theme for both, with marked similarities between the eighteenth-century agrarian revolution which Burns lived through and the changes in agriculture in Steinbeck's America. Nigel Leask has examined the work of Burns in the context of the poet's existence as a tenant farmer in the age of agricultural improvement and, in particular, Burns's sympathy for the victims of the changes that were taking place. Such changes are reflected, of course, in 'To a Mouse', where the insecurity of Burns's tenant farmer faced with dispossession lies behind the sympathetic identification with the dispossessed mouse. For Steinbeck, the Depression served as a backdrop to his great novels of the thirties. The writer highlighted the issue of sharecroppers being removed from their land by large agricultural machinery, as the land became the property of big business. As Muley Graves tells Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), when Tom comes back from prison to find his family gone:

> Well, the folks that owns the lan' says: "We can't afford to keep no tenants." An' they says: "The share a tenant gets is jus' the margin a profit we can't afford to lose." An' they says: "If we put all our lan' in one piece we can jus' hardly make her pay." So they tractored all the tenants off a the lan'."[268]

The realities facing the poor sharecroppers, and others earning a meagre existence from the land, helped to shape the politics of Steinbeck. In addition to the effect of the Depression, the United States experienced dramatic demographic change in the early twentieth century due to global migration, immigration and the Great Migration, which saw the large-scale movement of African-Americans into the cities from the rural South. With the growth of the cities, there developed a focus among writers of romanticising urban life and a tendency to view rural living as backward in comparison. However, in reaction to the lavish lifestyles evident in many of the cities, there also developed an increasing desire among many for an idealised closeness with nature and pastoral existence. There is a pastoral element to Steinbeck's work, reflecting his belief that "loosely organized communities of small farms on the frontier were particularly fecund settings for fresh projects and social invention."[269] Steinbeck's rural poor

[268] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 6.
[269] Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, 'Steinbeck and America's Liberal Political Tradition', *Steinbeck Review,* 16.1 (2019), 1-23 (p. 9).

share scarce resources and dream of new social arrangements in his fiction, his journalism and his works of social commentary.[270] Robert Burns had a similar attachment to the land and lamented the loss of "a Scotland of love, drink, and rural community destroyed by the forces of modern life."[271] The popular image of Burns as "heaven-taught ploughman" is a pastoral persona and, although the image itself is something of a myth, it illustrates the pastoral setting in which Burns is popularly viewed. Nigel Leask describes the world in which Burns grew up, part of a class "endowed with the progressive mandates of improvement but stymied by high rents and undercapitalization."[272] Burns believed in basic human rights, such as the right to work, and was well aware of the fact, according to Leask, that agricultural improvement had created a newly mobile labour force "demanding new welfare solutions."[273] It was in this environment that Burns's humanitarian and democratic values were born.

Steinbeck's rural focus in works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* can be described as Jeffersonian agrarianism: a faith in the common man, in self-sufficiency, a connection with the land and contempt for the forces of capitalism. Thomas Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), argued for the emerging United States to be founded on an agrarian ideology:

> While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe.[274]

As Chester E. Eisinger described it, Jeffersonian agrarianism was:

> essentially democratic: it insisted on the widespread ownership of property, on political and economic independence, on individualism; it created a society in which every individual had status; it made the dignity of man something more than a political slogan.[275]

Everybody had a right to land ownership, a right which was denied the poor sharecroppers as their small farms were destroyed by the tractors. Charles Wollenberg describes Steinbeck's

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[270] For example, in: *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939); "The Harvest Gypsies" (a series of articles for the *San Francisco News*, 1936); *Travels with Charley* (1962); *America and Americans* (1966).
[271] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland,* p. 1.
[272] Ibid., p. 117.
[273] Ibid., p. 125.
[274] Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson: Writings,* edited by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 291.
[275] Chester E. Eisinger, 'Jeffersonian Agrarianism in The Grapes of Wrath', *University of Kansas City Review,* 14 (Winter 1947), p. 145.

view of the Oklahoman migrants to California as "Jeffersonian yeomen" who deserved to own their own land.[276] However, the rural economy of California had never historically been dominated by Jeffersonian yeoman farmers but, instead, the Gold Rush of the previous century had introduced a system whereby commercial producers supplied the instant markets of San Francisco and the mining camps. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the character of Muley Graves is so attached to his Oklahoman land that, even in the face of the tractors, he decides to stay though his family have left for California. Grampa Joad is also reluctant to leave the land behind. Indeed, when he does head for California with the rest of his family, he is destroyed by the experience and dies not long into the journey. Eisinger argues that Steinbeck is attracted to Jeffersonian agrarianism because "he has the same humanistic interest in democracy that Jefferson had."[277] These values are evident in *Of Mice and Men*, in, for example, Lennie's dream of living off "the fatta the lan'". Similarly, in the case of Burns, Arun Sood recognises the Jeffersonian ideals of "Agrarian Republicanism" in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. [278] Sood refers to this "politicised, pastoral poem" of 1786 which advocates agrarian self-sufficiency and celebrates "thy hardy sons of rustic toil." (K 72). In the poem, the cotter's existence is idealised by Burns, thus acknowledging the value of the agrarian existence in the face of growing industrialisation. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the industrialisation of farming is the reason behind the removal of the sharecroppers from the land they have worked for generations.

Thus, Steinbeck's politics share origins with those of Burns, the ideology of both writers being tied to the land. As explored in the previous chapter, for some of his more radical politics, Steinbeck was influenced by his first wife, Carol. With the pervading view in America in the early-to-mid-twentieth century of Robert Burns being a poet of democracy, his appeal to both John and, especially, Carol is obvious. Susan Shillinglaw has shown how Carol's "more muscular social conscience" led John to political engagement in the thirties and also served as the catalyst for his three great novels of that decade: *In Dubious Battle* (1936); *Of Mice and Men* (1937); *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).[279] Carol had joined the Communist Party. She also encouraged John to attend meetings of the John Reed Club. This group of roughly 20 participants met weekly in a converted barn, where members listened to

[276] Charles Wollenberg, 'Introduction' to *The Harvest Gypsies: On The Road to The Grapes of Wrath,* by John Steinbeck (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1988), p. 8.
[277] Ibid., p. 149.
[278] Sood, *Eighty years 'Owre the Sea': Robert Burns and the early United States of America, c. 1786-1866,* p. 66.
[279] Shillinglaw, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 140.

lectures on Communism and studied its ideology. Carol was apparently an active participant at meetings and frequently spoke out against phonies, whom she referred to as "rich commies".[280] The couple also became involved with the gubernatorial campaign of the writer Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), a former member of the Socialist Party turned Democrat. This involvement in his End Poverty in California movement (EPIC), which included radical solutions for Depression-hit California, together with the couple's close relationship with Communist-supporting groups such as the John Reed Club, acted as an inspiration for what was to be Steinbeck's first critical and commercial success, *Tortilla Flat* (1935). Shillinglaw has shown how Danny and his friends in the novel pursue a way of life reminiscent of Sinclair's model group, "living in a kind of "social hall" – Danny's house – and relying on cooperation and barter, not money, for their needs."[281] Notwithstanding connections through Carol, Steinbeck was himself attracted to radical ideologies, especially in the 1930s. Steinbeck did, for a short time, experience an association and active participation with his own radicalism, in the form of Communist ideology. As will be shown below, however, Steinbeck's flirtation with radical politics was shorter-lived than that of Burns.

Steinbeck's interest in Communism was real. However, he was never himself fully immersed in the ideology and he was never a card-carrying member of the Party. The writer's views are evident in an exchange in *The Grapes of Wrath*. While Tom Joad and Pa help to dig a ditch, they fall into a conversation about what the term "red" means that they keep hearing being levelled against some of the workers. One of their fellow ditch-diggers, a character called Timothy, recounts a story about a landowner called Hines who used to speak constantly of "goddamn reds" and driving the "red bastards" out:

> Well, they were a young fella jus' come out west here, an' he's listenin' one day. He kinds scratched his head an' he says: "Mr Hines, I ain't been here long. What is these goddamn reds?" Well, sir, Hines says: "A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five!" Well, this young fella he thinks about her, an he scratches his head, an' he says: "Well, Jesus, Mr Hines, I ain't a son-of-a-bitch, but if that's what a red is – why, I want thirty cents an hour. Ever'body does. Hell, Mr Hines, we're all reds."[282]

To the landowners and the associations who represented their interests, anybody who spoke out in support of better conditions and decent wages for the workers, as Steinbeck did, was

[280] Ibid., p. 143.
[281] Ibid., p. 142.
[282] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 22.

considered a revolutionary. In addition to the views expressed in his fiction, Steinbeck was also occasionally forthright in his personal views. In a 1938 statement in support of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, for example, the writer claimed a similar form of fascism existed in America to that in Spain:

> Just returned from a little tour in the agricultural fields of California. We have our own fascist groups out here. They haven't bombed open towns yet but in Salinas last year tear gas was thrown in a Union Hall and through the windows of workingmen's houses. That's rather close, isn't it?[283]

Amid the economic conditions of Depression-era America, the landowners and business owners feared a workers' revolt similar to what had happened in Russia. Influential people who spoke out in favour of the workers were considered a threat, whether they actually advocated revolution or not. The thirties represented the peak of Communist influence in America. As Harvey Klehr commented, it was during this period that the party left the fringes and began to have real influence on contentious issues such as industrial unionism, unemployment support, collective security against fascism and others.[284] Having been formed in 1919, the first Manifesto of the Communist Party of America proclaimed:

> The world is on the verge of a new era. Europe is in revolt. The masses of Asia are stirring uneasily. Capitalism is in collapse. The workers of the world are seeing a new life and securing new courage. Out of the night of war is coming a new day.[285]

By 1935, the movement had gained a foothold in mainstream politics, largely due to the onset of the Depression which reignited their dreams of revolution and of the creation of a new social order based on justice, freedom and equality. The party gained nationwide publicity through their involvement, and leadership of, a series of high-profile strikes and demonstrations against increased unemployment in the early 1930s. In democratic circles support of the party was helped by their championing of the black community in the face of Southern racism and lynch-mob mentality. The authors of *The Secret World of American Communism* considered it "little wonder that some idealistic Americans… searching for greater social justice turned to communism and the Communist Party."[286] Through the 1930s, Communists could be found in most areas of American life. Writers, performers and

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[283] Charles Williams, 'Steinbeck as Anti-Fascist', *American Studies*, 53.4 (2014), 49-71 (p. 49).
[284] Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p.ix.
[285] Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 9.
[286] Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 8.

intellectuals were attracted to Communist-dominated groups such as the League of American Writers, of which John Steinbeck was a member, and the American League against War and Fascism. The actor, Will Geer (1902-1978), who played the character Candy in a theatrical adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, became a member of the Communist Party in 1934. Geer was a close friend of Woody Guthrie and was, in fact, instrumental in getting him recorded when he introduced Guthrie to the music folklorist and producer Alan Lomax. As an activist, Geer toured government work camps with Guthrie and other folk singers during the 1930s. It was a period when socialists and Communists in California regularly met and shared ideas. Although it is unclear whether Guthrie was actually a member of the Communist Party, he befriended a number of prominent party members and considered himself a Communist. Geer held "Grapes of Wrath" benefit events in support of migrant workers, which supporters of the cause, such as Pete Seeger, attended. It was at such an event that Steinbeck and Guthrie were introduced by Geer.

Guthrie, as outlined in chapter one, felt a deep affection for Robert Burns and was an admirer of the Scottish poet's work. That Steinbeck and Guthrie discussed Burns cannot be evidenced, yet it is difficult to imagine that they did not. Guthrie recognised in Burns a kindred spirit, whose poems and songs spoke to the ordinary folk and the oppressed, a poet who embodied humanitarian values. Steinbeck spoke admiringly of these same qualities when discussing Guthrie:

> Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he has any other name. He is just a voice and a guitar. He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people. Harsh voiced and nasal, his guitar hanging like a tire iron on a rusty rim, there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more important for those who will listen. There is the will of the people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit.[287]

Steinbeck is, thus, recognising in Guthrie the same attributes that Guthrie so admired in Burns, qualities which influenced the singer and strengthened his resolve as he struggled against the hardships faced by ordinary folk.

Therefore, to those fearful about the threat to American society that Communism seemed to pose in the 1930s, Steinbeck's interest in that ideology was a real concern. In his biography of Steinbeck, Jay Parini quotes a review of *The Grapes of Wrath* in *The New*

[287] Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (London: 1981), p. 160.

Yorker magazine which illustrates how genuinely powerful the novel was at the time. The review, by Clifton Fadiman, wrote:

> If only a couple of million overcomfortable people can be brought to read it, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* may actually effect something like a revolution in their minds and hearts.[288]

The publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939 was the culmination of a political journey that Steinbeck was on through the 1930s, with an increasing interest in the possibilities of a more radical political ideology to offer greater hope for ordinary people. By 1939, he was a more partisan writer than he was when he was first exploring his leftist views with Carol at the start of the decade. Even when he wrote *In Dubious Battle* in 1936, he did so in a more detached observational role rather than critical commentator. Part of the reason for this increased political awakening was the journalistic assignment he carried out for the *San Francisco News* in California, in 1936. He toured Hoovervilles[289] and migrant camps and published a series of six articles, which he called "The Harvest Gypsies". The articles depicted the reality of migrant poverty and inspired Steinbeck to write *The Grapes of Wrath*. Also of inspiration at this time was the Salinas Lettuce Strike which was brutally put down by a vigilante force organised by local law enforcement. Steinbeck experienced this strike in his home town of Salinas, witnessing at first hand "domestic fascism overriding democratic processes."[290] His radicalism grew towards the end of the decade and he became increasingly "engaged and enraged"[291] when he witnessed at first-hand the conditions which Oklahoma migrants were experiencing in California. He used his experiences of visiting the migrant camps to form the settings in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and his conversations with the migrants to help create his characterisation in the novel. He also wove in aspects of Communist ideology into the story. In one of the novel's most powerful scenes, Tom Joad's climactic speech when he tries to explain to Ma how he intends to continue Casy's legacy, for example:

> "Well, maybe like Casy says, a fellow ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one – an then-
> "Then what, Tom?"
> "Then it don't matter. Then I'll be aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where –

[288] Parini, *John Steinbeck: a biography,* p. 269.
[289] A Hooverville was a temporary encampment during the Depression. They were popularly named "Hoovervilles" after President Hoover as many people blamed him for the Depression. See Michael E. Parrish, Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), p. 240.
[290] Milton A. Cohen, *The Pull of Politics: Steinbeck, Wright, Hemingway, and the Left in the Late 1930s* (University of Missouri Press, 2018).
[291] Ibid.

> wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' – I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build – why, I'll be there.[292]

The cause of the people is radical; it demands revolution to achieve the social change necessary. Tom Joad begins to realise this at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, as Casy had done before he was murdered. Immediately prior to his death, Casy compares the cause to the great eighteenth-century revolutions in France and America when he is trying to convince Tom of the necessity of the ongoing strike. He explains that there has to be suffering by those who take the necessary action, like the patriots of the French Revolution or George Washington during the War of Independence, but they will be ultimately vindicated.[293] As will be shown below, the political radicalism of Robert Burns included support for both the American Revolution and French Revolution. It is likely, at this stage of his life, largely due to what he had witnessed in the migrant camps, that Steinbeck had reached the peak of his radicalism. He was as "engaged and enraged" as he would ever be. Steinbeck's narrator in *The Grapes of Wrath* writes that: "In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."[294] William Brevda has shown that, by referencing the lyrics of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic', which is itself an adaptation of 'John Brown's Body', which imagines the rebirth of the political martyr of that name, Steinbeck is alluding to the reawakening of the spirit of revolution among the people.[295] It is more likely that Steinbeck's activism was determined by his own life experience during the Depression, than it was directed by the work of Burns a century and a half earlier. Nonetheless, there was an important indirect political influence that came from the Burns-inspired Woody Guthrie, whose political activism Steinbeck held in high regard. Similarly, the interaction with high-profile socialists and Communists in California at this time helped to keep him motivated in his desire for social change.

As noted in chapter two, the Soviet Union was the inspiration for a large number of American Communists during the 1920s and 1930s. However, as the realities of the Stalin regime in Russia became more widely known, many Americans stopped openly supporting

[292] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 28.
[293] Ibid., Chapter 26.
[294] Ibid., Chapter 25.
[295] William Brevda, 'Spectres of Joad', *Steinbeck Review,* 13.2 (2016), p. 205.

the Soviet Union. Many writers, intellectuals and others, including Steinbeck, were appalled by what was happening. However, prior to the horrific truth of Soviet Russia being widely known, during the early thirties large numbers of Americans not only supported the USSR but escaped the Depression by emigrating there: "Where Capitalism had failed them, Communism promised dignity for the working man, racial equality and honest labour."[296] The USSR offered the same values to which these working men aspired. Robert Burns was viewed as a revolutionary hero by the USSR. His reputation in Russia was already well established in the nineteenth century, with the eminent revolutionary democrat, Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), naming Burns, together with Shakespeare and the English Romantic poets "as one of those whose names and works formed part of the rich treasury of lyrical poetry."[297] As chapter two shows, due largely to the ideological translations of Burns's works by Samuil Yakovlevich Marshak, Burns was highly respected by Soviet Russia, where he was viewed as a revolutionary democrat. This perception of the poet's ideology was widespread amongst Communists during the mid-twentieth century, not just in the USSR. Clark McGinn has shown that an early Communist Burns Supper was held by members of the International Brigade prior to the Battle of Jarama, in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War.[298] By the 1950s, the *Daily Worker* in the UK was concerned that British Communists were not doing enough to "rescue" Burns from being appropriated by those on the right. The newspaper opined that, like Russia, they should be politicising Burns, otherwise the upcoming bicentenary of the poet's birth would be "celebrated merely by banquets of stiffed shirts or of shopkeepers aspiring to be stuffed shirts," and would be "a caricature of the poet who held that 'liberty's a glorious feast.'"[299]

Burns was alive at a time when a distinctly modern radicalism that proposed an end to poverty was emerging in Britain. This was the result of a number of factors, including: the social and political thought of Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith; the social theories of the Marquis de Condorcet; political writers, including Thomas Paine; the republican and democratic revolutions in America and France.[300] As recent scholarship illustrates, Burns's

[296] Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia* (Abacus, 2008).
[297] Gabriel Feldman, 'Burns – the Naturalised Russian', *Burns Chronicle* (1978), p. 11.
[298] McGinn, *The Burns Supper: A Comprehensive History*, p. 175.
[299] Ibid., p. 176.
[300] Gareth Stedman Jones examines all these individual factors in *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Columbia University Press, 2005). Nigel Leask makes reference to Stedman Jones's argument in relation to Burns in *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, p. 142.

own political ideology was heavily influenced by contemporary discussions, publications and ideas concerning events in Britain, France and America.[301] 'Man Was Made To Mourn' (1784), while not especially revolutionary in nature, explores the plight of the poor and laments class inequality. Nigel Leask suggests there is a radical edge to the poem in that it, "unequivocally rejects the notion…that poverty is part of nature's plan."[302] To properly understand the context in which Burns's more radical beliefs came to the fore, in his poetry and his private correspondence, it is necessary to understand the political reality through which he was living. The American War of Independence had occurred during his youth, while the French Revolution was taking place as he wrote and published his later poetry and songs. Burns supported both revolutions and risked his livelihood, possibly even his life, by proclaiming that support in verse.[303] Radical politics in Britain were on the increase in the aftermath of the French Revolution, inspired by the writings of Thomas Paine. The government in Britain feared insurrection during the 1790s, in what became known as the revolutionary decade. Burns wrote his 'A Fragment' ('Ballad on the American War') shortly after the end of the American Revolution and it is one of his earliest political songs. (K 38). It displays detailed knowledge of figures involved and of important battle sites and events of the war, which demonstrates how closely he followed developments. The ballad ridicules British military figures and champions the heroes of the revolution. A decade later, Burns wrote 'Ode for General Washington's Birthday' in which he attacked the British government for waging war with France. It illustrates how he was still interested in American politics after the revolutionary period and into the 1790s.

In private correspondence, too, Burns spoke of his support for the revolution in France. In a letter to Frances Dunlop, he wrote about the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette: "What is there in the delivering over a perjured Blockhead and an unprincipled Prostitute to the hands of the hangman, that it should arrest for a moment, attention…" (L 649). The political climate in Britain in the 1790s, therefore, was dangerous. To be a supporter of the French Revolution was viewed as seditious and a punishable offence. It should also be noted that for all the pro-revolutionary sentiments the poet wrote down and which survive today, notably in correspondence with Mrs Dunlop and Maria Riddell,

[301] Gerard Carruthers (editor), *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
[302] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland*, p. 125.
[303] For example, he makes evident his support for the American revolutionaries in 'Ode for General Washington's Birthday' (1794) and his 'A Man's a Man' (1795) espouses the values of the French Revolution.

confidantes who perhaps did not share similar views, he probably made known his feelings verbally in mixed company innumerable times. Moreover, some of his closest friends in Dumfries, including Dr James Maxwell, John Lewars and John Syme, were also sympathisers of revolution, thus even the company he kept could have resulted in his arrest.[304] While it is difficult to compare the experiences of Burns to Steinbeck's America, Priscilla J Kucik has noted that the prevailing mood of Burns's final years were reminiscent of the McCarthy era in 1950s America, a time when writers such as John Steinbeck were getting investigated by their government.[305]

The publication of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1791 was a cause for concern amongst members of the propertied class. Christopher Hitchens states that Paine's work, in which he argued against monarchy and in support of democracy, "is both a trumpet of inspiration and a carefully wrought blueprint for a more rational and decent ordering of society, both domestically and on the international scene."[306] The denunciation and subsequent outlawing of Paine's work highlights the anti-democratic position of the establishment. For example, William Wilberforce, celebrated today for his role in the abolition of slavery, was informed about Paine's "mischievous work" and its distribution among the lower classes. Gareth Stedman Jones describes Wilberforce's response:

> Wilberforce replied… that he did not fear "a speedy commotion", since "almost every man of property in the kingdom" was "a friend of civil order" and "if a few mad-headed professors of liberty and equality were to attempt to bring their theories into practice, they would be crushed in an instant."[307]

In 1792, the government issued a proclamation against seditious writing.[308] Paine was tried and convicted in absentia for treason. Nevertheless, within two years of its appearance, 250,000 copies of *Rights of Man* had been sold.[309] Radicals in Scotland were transported to Botany Bay for periods of between seven to fourteen years in 1793-1794 after a series of high-profile sedition trials, most famously the political reformer and lawyer, Thomas Muir.[310] Burns completed the writing of 'Scots Wha Hae' around the time of Muir's trial, and it is

[304] Crawford, *The Bard,* p. 397.
[305] Priscilla J. Kucik, 'The Political Activism of Robert Burns', *Burns Chronicle* (Spring 2008), p. 16.
[306] Christopher Hitchens, *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man* (London: 2006), p. 11.
[307] Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 38.
[308] The Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings was issued on 21 May, 1792.
[309] Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate,* p. 38.
[310] Gerard Carruthers and Don Martin, eds, *Thomas Muir of Huntershill: essays for the twenty first century* (Edinburgh: Humming Earth, 2016).

believed the song was penned in tribute to the Scottish lawyer and his fellow radicals. The final line exclaims, "Let us Do—or Die!!!" Liam McIlvanney refers to the fact that these words came from the Tennis Court Oath of the French Revolutionaries.[311] Therefore, the meaning of the song is shown to have contemporary significance. Nigel Leask has stated that, while Burns does not mention Paine anywhere in his writings, he had almost certainly read *Rights of Man*. Burns's 'A Man's a Man for A' That' (1795) dignifies the poor and shares the themes of liberty, equality and universal human rights with Paine's book. Burns also directly refers to Paine's *Rights of Man* in his own 'The Rights of Woman' (1792). (K 390).

A century and a half later, John Steinbeck was writing on similar themes as Paine. In one of the short, intercalary chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel full of 1930s radicalism, Steinbeck writes to "you who hate change and fear revolution":

> If you who own the things people must have could understand this, you might preserve yourself. If you could separate causes from results, if you could know that Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin were results, not causes, you might survive.[312]

Paine was still very relevant in the America of the thirties and forties. When President Roosevelt made his speech after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in order to rally the people against fascism, he quoted Paine's *The Crisis* (1775), beginning: "These are the times that try men's souls…"[313] There are further aspects of Paine's writing reflected in Steinbeck's work during the 1930s. For example, in *Rights of Man*, Paine declares: "In stating these matters, I speak an open and disinterested language, dictated by no passion but that of humanity."[314] Commenting on *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck insisted that his story of the strike was written from an objective viewpoint and he had no stake in the wider political implications. His was a detached perspective, speaking on behalf of humanity as a whole, like Paine before him.

[311] The deputies of the Third Estate, representing the common people in France during the revolutionary period, met on an indoor tennis court, vowing not to disband until a new French constitution had been adopted. Liam McIlvanney, *Burns The Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p. 213.
[312] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Arrow Books, 1998), Chapter 14.
[313] Hitchens, *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man,* p. 142.
[314] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine* (Signet Classics, July 2003), p. 338.

Both Burns and Steinbeck attracted criticism and outright hostility to their radical viewpoints. Burns's above-mentioned toast to George Washington had given offence when he proposed the general "a better man" than Pitt. For expressing his more radical sympathies, Burns was reprimanded. While at the theatre in Dumfries in 1792, at a point in proceedings when 'God Save the King' was called for, a group shouted for the French Revolutionary song 'Ça ira' instead which almost caused a riot. Reports had apparently suggested that Burns had taken part in the seditious singing.[315] He was subsequently investigated as a disaffected person by his employer, the Excise Board. An inquiry into his conduct and his political beliefs was undertaken. When he learned he was going to be investigated, Burns immediately wrote to his friend, Robert Graham of Fintry, a member of the Board. He begged Graham, as a husband and father, to think of the fate of his family should he lose his job and be imprisoned or transported. He proclaimed his innocence of revolutionary conduct and that he was a member of no republican or reform groups. He admitted to being in Dumfries Theatre when 'Ça ira' had been called for but that he had taken no part. He protested that, "the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a LIE!" (L 528). At the subsequent investigation, Burns was found innocent, but he was advised to be careful. In 1794, Burns proposed the toast, "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause", and one of those in attendance, a Captain Dods, took offence. With memories of being investigated still fresh in his mind, Burns worried what may happen to him should Dods make a complaint. He, therefore, wrote the next day to Samuel Clarke, Junior, a letter in which he mentioned he had been drunk the previous night and now needed his assistance. He wrote anxiously that the toast he had given was, "A toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to." He explained that "the report of certain Political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction" and feared that "last night's business may be misrepresented in the same way." (L 631). Due to the pervading political climate, Burns chose to cloak his authorship of his more radical works. For example, 'Ode for General Washington's Birthday' was not published during his lifetime. He also disguised his authorship of 'Scots Wha Hae'. While he admitted writing the song in correspondence to friends and acquaintances including Maria Riddell and Frances Dunlop, he published it anonymously in the *London Morning Chronicle*.[316] The radicalism of the poem was also

[315] Crawford, *The Bard,* p. 359.
[316] Corey E. Andrews, 'Radical Attribution: Robert Burns and "The Liberty Tree"', *Studies in Scottish Literature,* 41.1 (2015), 174-190 (p. 183).

disguised by replacing contemporary views on the cause of liberty with a celebration of the struggle for freedom from Scotland's history.

Steinbeck was similarly condemned for his radicalism. Accusations that he was a "red" followed him throughout his career from the late 1930s. When *The Grapes of Wrath* was in the process of being published, Steinbeck was certain that he was being investigated by the FBI. Steinbeck reported to his agent that, in Monterey, a bookshop owner was questioned by FBI agents. The writer also became aware that his name had been turned in to the sheriff's office at Los Gatos, the town in which Steinbeck lived.[317] In 1942 Steinbeck wrote a letter to Livingston Biddle, Attorney General in President Roosevelt's administration, complaining that his attempts to obtain an Army commission were being thwarted by J Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, due to suspected Communist sympathies: "Do you suppose you could ask Edgar's boys to stop stepping on my heels? They think I'm an enemy alien. It's getting tiresome."[318] Although Hoover denied Steinbeck was being investigated, subsequently released FBI files show that a full investigation took place "to determine his suitability to hold a commission in the US Army."[319] Following the investigation, a memo was sent in 1943 to the Chief of Military Intelligence in Washington:

> In view of substantial doubt as to Subject's loyalty and discretion, it is recommended that Subject not be considered favorably for a commission in the Army of the United States.[320]

As has been mentioned above, Steinbeck's more radical activities reached a peak around the time of *The Grapes of Wrath* and he started to distance himself from accusations that he was ever a Communist, or even speaking favourably about the ideology. Nevertheless, he continued to be investigated by Hoover and the FBI, most notably around the period of the publication of his *A Russian Journal* (1948), the height of McCarthyism in the early 1950s and in the early 1960s, when *The Winter of Our Discontent* was being published (1961).[321] His radical sentiment had not entirely faded and was still evident, for example, in his enthusiasm for telling the story of Emiliano Zapata. Steinbeck's screenplay for the film *Viva*

[317] Susan Shillinglaw, 'Introduction' to *A Russian Journal* by John Steinbeck (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.xxii.
[318] William Ray, 'What FBI Files Reveal about Hoover's War on Steinbeck', on *Steinbeck Now* website (17 August, 2013). [site accessed 16 March 2021].
[319] Shillinglaw, 'Introduction' to *A Russian Journal* by John Steinbeck, p.xxii.
[320] Herbert Mitgang, 'Policing America's Writers', *The New Yorker*, September 28, 1987.
[321] Ibid.

Zapata! (1952), about the Mexican revolutionary hero who led an agrarian peasant uprising against a corrupt landowning elite, dealt with themes similar to his novels of the thirties. It was not just the government that was hostile to Steinbeck. Following the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the book was banned in a number of cities and the Associated Farmers of California, an influential anti-labour organisation, denounced Steinbeck and labelled the novel a pack of lies. Steinbeck became the victim of a whispering campaign which condemned him as a dangerous "red". Like Robert Burns and his radical views, Steinbeck had to watch his back.

The common humanity of man was a principle that was important to both Burns and Steinbeck. This is best exemplified by Burns in 'A Man's a Man for a' That', which he wrote in 1795, with its memorable couplet: "The rank is but the guinea's stamp,|The Man's the gowd for a' that." (K 482). With recognisable similarities to Paine's *Rights of Man*,[322] Burns's poem conveys the belief that no matter where they came from, or their position in society, every person is worth the same. Acknowledging the recognisably Burnsian themes in *The Grapes of Wrath*, a review of the 1940 film adaptation of Steinbeck's novel begins by quoting Burns's 'Man Was Made To Mourn' (1784): "Man's inhumanity to Man has never been so bitterly, so cruelly, so realistically revealed on the screen as it is in the film version of John Steinbeck's searing story."[323] The commonality of man, for both writers, included a belief in equality for all and a disdain for prejudice. Burns, as was shown earlier in the thesis, was championed by abolitionists in the nineteenth century and Civil Rights leaders in the twentieth century for displaying such qualities. Steinbeck, throughout his work, portrayed disfavoured, disadvantaged and discriminated against groups and individuals in a sensitive and sympathetic light. The economic migrants who were treated with prejudice in "The Harvest Gypsies", and who Steinbeck fictionalises in *The Grapes of Wrath*, are treated with respect by the writer, and their lives and struggles afforded a certain dignity. The paisanos of *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and the white lower classes of *Cannery Row* (1945) are essentially down-to-earth, good characters with hearts of gold. In *Travels with Charley* (1962), Steinbeck speaks about the race problem in the American South and how he felt unqualified to discuss it. He says this is because, when he was growing up in Salinas, there was only one black family and his experience was an overwhelmingly positive one. He was friends with the

[322] Textual note, in Kinsley, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (K 482).
[323] '"The Grapes of Wrath" Becomes a Notable Film', *The Washington Post*, 20 March, 1940.

Cooper children and acted as pallbearer at the funeral of the eldest, Ulysses. Steinbeck wrote that, "When I heard, for example, that Negroes were an inferior race, I thought the authority was misinformed."[324] On a number of occasions in *Travels with Charley,* Steinbeck touches on the race issue and, although he proclaimed to be a "professed outsider", he felt the day was fast approaching when there would be equality.[325] In correspondence, Steinbeck spoke more openly against discrimination. He received a letter claiming that *The Grapes of Wrath* was Jewish propaganda and that he, Steinbeck, must prove he is not Jewish. His response, written "with a good deal of sadness" was that "it does not seem important to me whether I am Jewish or not." He continues that, "It happens that I am not Jewish and have no Jewish blood but it only happens that way. I find that I do not experience any pride that it is so." Moreover, he insists that:

> Those who wish for one reason or another to believe me Jewish will go on believing it while men of good will and good intelligence won't care one way or another. I can prove these things of course - but when I shall have to - the American democracy will have disappeared.[326]

Although this commonality of man, what could be described as internationalism, was a common characteristic of both Steinbeck and Burns, both men were also nationalists, or perhaps more accurately, patriots, which is perhaps unusual given that both supported radical social reform at government level. Steinbeck's more radical beliefs, however, were never anti-American, or even anti US government. For example, the government camps in *The Grapes of Wrath,* which are a haven for the migrants, are viewed in a very positive light. This is based on his own experiences in visiting camps while researching "The Harvest Gypsies". He also volunteered to be of service during World War II. He retained an admiration for - and intense interest in - his country throughout his life. In *Travels with Charley,* he takes a road trip across the United States in order to reconnect and get a better understanding of the state of his country. *America and Americans* (1966), Steinbeck's last book, is a collection of his journalism and musings about his country, its culture, history and its people. Likewise, it might be argued that Burns's writing – journals, commonplace books, correspondence and poetry – contain his reflections on Scotland and her culture, history and politics. Corey E. Andrews has written that, "In eighteenth-century Scotland, the idea of liberty was deeply embedded in the momentous political change in governance wrought by the Union of

[324] John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).
[325] Ibid.
[326] Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds., *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters,* p. 203.

1707."[327] The Union, together with the recent Jacobite history and the British reaction to radical discourse in the 1790s, made the situation in Scotland different from that in either Revolutionary America or France. Andrews has argued that, "there was deep skepticism about the plausibility of political liberty within the confines of the British Union."[328] Burns had sent a letter to the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* in 1789, under the pseudonym "John Barleycorn", complaining about the bad treatment of Scottish distillers. This was in the form of an open letter to Prime Minister Pitt protesting whisky duties which, he said, favoured English distillers because it was felt by the government that they held more electoral sway. Thus, "the corrupting influence of Westminster policies was threatening the welfare of Scotland."[329] Burns had earlier satirised the government's taxation on whisky in 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer', in which he lamented the jeopardization of Scotland's economic welfare by the Act of Union. In a letter to Frances Dunlop in 1790, Burns wrote:

> You know my National Prejudices… Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my Country reaps from a certain Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her Independence, & even her very Name!
>
> (L 397)

'Such A Parcel Of Rogues In A Nation' (1791) is Burns's protest song about the corrupt ambition and greed of the Members of the Scottish Parliament who accepted bribes for signing the Act of Union. To those who claim Burns came to believe in the Union and his support for an independent Scotland was not longstanding, his joining of the Dumfries Volunteers, together with his song 'The Dumfries Volunteers', is incontrovertible proof. Liam McIlvanney has an alternative explanation for this apparent inconsistency in Burns's radical politics, arguing that the poem, which is concerned with a possibly imminent invasion of Britain by France, has been "misread as vulgar loyalism". The last line of the poem is the ambiguous: "But while we sing, GOD SAVE THE KING, | We'll ne'er forget THE PEOPLE!" (K 484). Thus, even this supposedly loyalist poem ends with a nod to reform. For McIlvanney, the poem should be seen as consistent with Burns's radicalism, that it is not for the armies of France to do revolutionary Britons' work for them in fixing the wrongs of the British state. McIlvanney points out that it was often local radicals who most enthusiastically joined Volunteer companies, that they were independent groups and not controlled by

[327] Andrews, 'Radical Attribution: Robert Burns and "The Liberty Tree"', p. 174.
[328] Ibid.
[329] McIlvanney, *Burns The Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland,* p. 84.

government, by whom they were viewed with suspicion.[330] Burns's work and personal correspondence does suggest support for social change within an independent Scotland.

The connection to their respective countries also led both Steinbeck and Burns to worry about the survival of national culture amid a changing world, albeit 150 years apart. This similarity was discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to agricultural improvement and the loss of a rural way of life. It also manifested itself in another way. Both Burns and Steinbeck were interested in the survival of their national culture. According to Patrick Hogg, "Burns knew that as long as the Scots language is artistically vital and alive in our own culture, then Scottish identity will survive."[331] Although he wrote much of his work in the English language, Burns knew also that Scots could be a language of artistic expression and he was determined to ensure its survival as such. Steinbeck, as mentioned in chapter two, was a champion of writing in the authentic language of ordinary working folk, most notably in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Towards the end of his life, he feared for the survival of regional speech in America and felt that the culture would be poorer for increasing homogeneity. He wrote, in 1962:

> Radio and television speech becomes standardized, perhaps better English than we have ever used. Just as our bread, mixed and baked, packaged and sold without benefit of accident of human frailty, is uniformly good and uniformly tasteless, so will our speech become one speech.[332]

As Steinbeck wrote about his experiences on journeys within his own country, for example, in *Travels with Charley,* Burns similarly embarked on tours around Scotland in 1787. As Nigel Leask has commented, Burns was "capitalizing on his new-found fame as 'Caledonia's Bard'".[333] He visited the Borders, venturing into northern England, before heading to the west Highlands. Later that year he toured the Highlands and visited various sites, including Linlithgow Palace and Culloden battlefield. On his tours, he kept journals and wrote letters, in which he reflected on aspects of Scottish society and culture, and gathered details for later work, notably songs about specific places and events. Like Steinbeck in *Travels with Charley*, he commented on contemporary socio-political issues and, for Burns, the state of agricultural improvement in the places he visited was of particular interest.[334] He also visited

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[330] Ibid., p. 237.
[331] 'How important to modern day Scotland is Robert Burns', *The Scotsman*, 19 January, 2016.
[332] John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).
[333] Nigel Leask, ed., *The Oxford Edition of The Works of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 110.
[334] Ibid., p. 142.

sites relating to events in Scottish history, remarking in a letter to Robert Muir that at the battlefield of Bannockburn he "said a fervent prayer for old Caledonia". (L131).

Thus, as Scotland was important to Burns, and influenced much of his greatest work, Steinbeck had similar affinity for the nation of his birth, as well as a concern for its future direction. Furthermore, in addition to Steinbeck's affection for the country of his birth, he had an interest in Scotland and its constitutional future. In response to a letter he had received from Jacqueline Kennedy, in which she spoke about her late husband, John F. Kennedy, and the subject of lost causes, Steinbeck responded to a particular point she had proposed:

> I have been thinking about what you said regarding lost causes. And it is such a strange subject. It seems to me that the only truly lost causes are those which win. Only then do they break up into mean little fragments. You talked of Scotland as a lost cause and that is not true. Scotland is an unwon cause.[335]

Whether Steinbeck's interest in Scotland and the cause of national self-determination came from a knowledge of Burns, or via another source, he was certainly of the opinion that Scotland's independence was there to be taken.

It is, therefore, beyond doubt that both Steinbeck and Burns held radical beliefs for the respective times in which they lived. However, it also seems clear that Steinbeck grew less radical following the peak of his flirtation with Communism in the 1930s, when he abandoned his radicalism in favour of more mainstream politics. By 1947 and his tour of the Soviet Union with the photographer Robert Capa, the account of which became *A Russian Journal*, Steinbeck had privately "renounced any political sympathies he might once have shared with the Bolsheviks."[336] His trip with Capa, therefore, rather than indicating a real belief in Communism at this time, represented a genuine interest in studying people and their everyday experiences, as is reflected in much of his work; he wanted to witness for himself the Russian people living the socialist ideal. The movements of Steinbeck and Capa in the Soviet Union were scrutinized by the KGB, the resultant files of which show that the Soviets were convinced he was no ally at this time:

Steinbeck is a man of conservative conviction and, in addition, he has

[335] Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* p. 795.
[336] Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia*, p. 270.

> recently become more right-wing oriented. That's why our approach to him should be especially cautious and we should avoid showing him something that can do us any harm.[337]

The breakdown of Steinbeck's marriage to Carol would likely have contributed to his retreat from involvement in radical politics, certainly from links to some of their mutual comrades in California.[338] Steinbeck's experiences in the Soviet Union served to reinforce this estrangement from radicalism. In a letter of 1950, his position on Communism, as he had witnessed it in Russia, was clear:

> I have been horrified at the creeping paralysis that is coming out of the Kremlin, the death of art and thought, the death of individuals and the only creative thing in the world is the individual. When I was in Russia a couple of years ago I could see no creative thing. The intellectuals parroted articles they had read in safe magazines. It makes me more than sorry, it makes me nauseated.[339]

The above comment, written to his friend, the Swedish artist Bo Beskow, seems to indicate genuine sadness at the failure of the Communist experiment. Tzouliadis considers the position of anti-Communism that Steinbeck thereafter held for the rest of his life "was a common enough journey among those who had seen the truth at first hand in the USSR, and lived to report their experience."[340] In later life he began, also, to sympathise with the anger that Californians had with floods of displaced migrants moving into the state. In an interview in 1952 he stated: "I had been filled with anger at people who were doing injustices to other people… I realize now that everyone was caught in the same trap."[341] He still considered himself revolutionary in the 1950s, not in relation to any political ideology, but rather because of his commitment to the creative mind:

> Herein is my revolt. I believe in and will fight for the right of the individual to function as an individual without pressure from any direction. I am unalterable opposed to any interference with the creative mind.[342]

Thus, he was clearly critical of the role of authoritarians, of the right and the left, in stifling creativity. In this, Steinbeck was similar to Robert Burns, who, in 1792, wrote, "Here's freedom to them that wad write" in his poem, 'Here's a Health to them that's awa.' (K 391).

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[337] Shillinglaw, 'Introduction' to *A Russian Journal* by John Steinbeck (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.xxiii.
[338] Carol and John Steinbeck separated in 1941.
[339] Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters,* p. 403.
[340] Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia*, p. 271.
[341] An interview with the *Voice of America,* as quoted in a book review in *Steinbeck Review,* 14.1 (2017), 95-98 (p. 96).
[342] Zirakzadeh, 'Steinbeck and America's Liberal Political Tradition'.

In 1795, Burns wrote an 'Inscription for an Altar of Independence' in support of Patrick Heron's election campaign, whom Burns admired for his independent mind:

> Thou of an independent mind,
> With soul resolv'd, with soul resign'd;
> Prepar'd Power's proudest frown to brave,
> Who wilt not be, nor have a slave;
> Virtue alone who dost revere,
> Thy own reproach alone dost fear-
> Approach this shrine, and worship here.
>
> (K 505)

Therefore, although Steinbeck retreated from his more radical political ideology after 1940, he was still outspoken in causes close to his heart, causes that, it might be argued, he shared with Robert Burns. Moreover, notwithstanding his obvious later distaste for Communism, there is still considerable evidence of Steinbeck's support for democratic values. He continued, for example, to lampoon conservatism in his later career. Just as he had done in the 1930s with Carol, when together they ridiculed the staid conservatism of Pacific Grove, the town in which they lived, he did so once again in 1954's *Sweet Thursday*. When the butterflies, for which Pacific Grove was famous, failed to arrive one year, "solid citizens placed the blame where it belonged, on Roosevelt-Truman socialism."[343] Like those "solid citizens" who found themselves satirised by Steinbeck, Robert Burns, similarly, showed "a readiness to chastise his social superiors."[344] Burns satirises class in 'The Twa Dogs', for example, with a disparaging account of the ruling classes and social inequality. In 'Ballad on the American War', Burns likewise satirises the politically inept British leaders. When, in *Sweet Thursday*, Steinbeck highlights the hypocrisy of the Mayor of Pacific Grove, the upholder of conservative values who is caught in a brothel, he is doing what Burns did in pointing out the double standards of those of moral authority, such as in 'Holy Willie's Prayer.' Towards the end of his life, in *Travels with Charley* (1962), Steinbeck argued vehemently with his sisters about their support of Republicanism and their antipathy towards Robert Kennedy. "You talk like a Communist,"[345] accused one of his sisters, showing that, even then, once his radicalism had cooled and he was now a mainstream Democrat, the accusations of Communism were never far away.

[343] John Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), Chapter 38.
[344] McIlvanney, *Burns The Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, p. 67.
[345] John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 152.

The similar views in relation to equality and universal brotherhood shared by Burns and Steinbeck helped shape the work of both writers. Although Steinbeck was later to abandon his more radical beliefs, and by the early 1940s he had abandoned any support he once had for Communism, he retained his belief in democracy. By contrast, Burns held on to his radicalism all his life and, if anything, became increasingly radical as the popular revolutionary movement of the 1790s became more established. Burns did not live to old age. Had the poet, who was only 37 years of age when he died, lived longer and achieved further success with his poetry and songs, would his radicalism have reduced with a comfortable life? It seems unlikely. Burns's beliefs were deeply ingrained, sentiments expressed, for example, in 'A Man's a Man For A' That', which was written just two years prior to his death. Having witnessed what had happened to Thomas Muir and other political reformers and radicals, rather than being deterred, Burns continued to risk his own livelihood in expressing his views, both in his poetry and in his personal correspondence. For both Burns and Steinbeck, the strength of feeling toward their respective causes is reflected in the passion of their work. In the case of Burns, his political conviction remained strong until his death, his passion evident in his works and correspondence as the struggle for greater democracy and political reform was taking place across the country. Steinbeck took an active interest in politics throughout his life although, as has been discussed, his views became more mainstream after the 1930s. Nevertheless, his most powerful and controversial novels, *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* coincided with his engagement with radical politics.

Conclusion

Pascal Covici, John Steinbeck's long-time editor and friend, wrote to the author when he found out about his intended trip to the Soviet Union in 1947. Covici had been concerned about Steinbeck, who at the time had been suffering from depression, and told him he hoped the trip:

> would bring you back to earth again, face to face with fundamental human values. There is a giant dormant in your soul and I want to see it stir with the compassion and generous understanding that is yours, yours above any other writer in America.[346]

These "fundamental human values", evident in many of Burns's poems, are what Steinbeck shared with the Scots poet. Both Steinbeck and Burns wrote compassionately about common people and, moreover, were concerned with accurately portraying the speech of ordinary folk. They were both sentimental in their writing, a trait that has been portrayed negatively in some quarters.[347] However, the sentimentality of Steinbeck and Burns can be perceived as genuine and honest and representative of the ideology of both. Burns's sentimentality, so admired by Wordsworth, came from his affection for the humble, rustic people about whom he wrote. Similar humble and rustic folk can be found in the stories of Steinbeck, from the Paisanos of *Tortilla Flat* early in the 1930s, through the three instalments of the Dustbowl Trilogy in the second half of that decade, and on to novels such as *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* later in his career. The breaking of "Nature's social union", Burns's line from 'To a Mouse' and the title of this thesis, is another theme shared by both, namely the destruction of the sacred bond between mankind and nature. The interrelationship between all living things, what Barbara Heavilin calls "harmony, unity, oneness", was valued by both writers, and a disturbance in the balance of this relationship is lamented on the pages of their respective creative outputs. Beyond the title given to *Of Mice and Men*, the similarity in themes between the two pieces of work illustrate that Steinbeck had a good knowledge of the work of Burns. Moreover, the two writers share stylistic similarities. The simple prose and clear writing of Steinbeck has helped to ensure as many people as possible understand the messages he conveys through his work. In relation to Burns's 'A Man's a Man for A' That', Snyder notes it is interesting that:

> there are only two hundred and sixty-three words, all told, in the poem, and

[346] Zachary Jonathan Jacobson, '*A Russian Journal*: John Steinbeck's Quixotic Quest to the Soviet Union', *Steinbeck Review,* 13.1 (2016), 50-65 (p. 51).
[347] See Chapter two for a discussion on sentimentality in the writing of Burns and Steinbeck.

> that two hundred and forty of this total are monosyllables. It is easy to read, this last of Burns's great lyrics; its very simplicity is one cause of its widespread appeal.[348]

The shared values of Burns and Steinbeck are also evident in the sphere of politics. They are tied as writers to the politics of landscape. The subject of agriculture and the real socio-political problems related to the land was a common motif in the works of both writers. They shared a passion for the land and the politics of small farming communities and the associated social arrangements. Both were involved in radical politics, although Steinbeck's radicalism, at least after the 1930s, was not as deep-seated as that of Burns throughout his life. Steinbeck retained a democratic ideology all his life and, like Burns, believed in equality and opposed prejudice. However, his more radical beliefs were abandoned in later life. Burns retained his radicalism throughout his - albeit shorter - life. Inspired by revolution in America and France, and by figures such as Thomas Muir closer to home, he faced significant risk to his position and livelihood by supporting the cause of liberty. It has become apparent over the course of this study that, more so than sharing similarities in political ideology per se, it was the respective reactions to their political personae by the authorities of their time that were alike.[349] Moreover, the comparison of how the two responded to the censorship they faced was a worthwhile study in showing the contrasting levels of commitment to the respective causes to which their names have become associated. Steinbeck did remain committed to the cause of individual freedom and, in this, he was similar to Burns. Unlike Burns, however, Steinbeck's championing of this cause resulted in a conflict with some of his other views. It contributed to his later distrust and enmity towards Communism when he discovered how creative individuality was stifled under the Soviet system.[350]

Steinbeck's democratic ideology was formed at an early age. The ideals represented in his great thirties novels, and elsewhere in his work, can be traced back to his early childhood reading. The example studied in this thesis, Seymour Deming's 'This Distrust of Democracy', illustrates how influential the periodicals Steinbeck read as a youngster were for his future outlook; periodicals in which the figure of Robert Burns featured prominently. This

[348] Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns,* p. 423.
[349] Notwithstanding the fact that it is difficult to compare particular aspects of politics at such contrasting time periods, both writers came under extreme pressure due to their perceived political sympathies at certain points in their careers.
[350] See Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia* for further discussion on this issue.

demonstrates, beyond extant scholarship on the subject, how Steinbeck was aware of Burns and his works and had a good knowledge of the themes about which the Scottish poet wrote. In the absence of empirical evidence that Steinbeck specifically studied Burns, or set out in his career distinctly to tackle the same themes as the Scots poet, it can be concluded that the American author was aware of the work of Burns and, in the case of 'To a Mouse', was acquainted enough to understand that the novella he would ultimately call *Of Mice and Men* was concerned with similar themes. Whether this was his intention from the outset cannot be determined. Taking into consideration that it was Carol who recommended the title *Of Mice and Men*, Tom Barden's suggestion[351] that the inclusion of mice in the novella was an afterthought, must remain a possibility. Nevertheless, Steinbeck's prior knowledge of Burns points at least to an indirect influence of the Scots poet on Steinbeck.

Furthermore, this thesis presents new work on the perception of Burns in Steinbeck's America. What is evident is that Steinbeck was growing up and finding his voice as a writer at a time when Burns's image was everywhere, and the overwhelming view of the poet culturally was as a champion of democracy. In an academic context too, the perception of Burns was as poet of democracy. The scholarly work of Franklyn Bliss Snyder and John DeLancey Ferguson was prominent in America in the 1930s, a time when Steinbeck was writing his great novels of social conscience. Some of Steinbeck's contemporaries, writers including William Faulkner, Willa Cather, Jesse Stuart, Robert Frost and Arthur Miller, were themselves familiar with, and to varying degrees, influenced by Burns. Woody Guthrie and other prominent Americans within Steinbeck's circle were also influenced by Burns, and could have, in turn, been an indirect influence on Steinbeck. Much of Guthrie's song-writing focused on similar themes to Steinbeck, often centring around Dustbowl America and the struggles of ordinary folk. Guthrie openly admired Burns and this love of Burns influenced other artists, including Bob Dylan. Steinbeck and Guthrie had the same circle of friends and attended the same parties during the period of Steinbeck's interest in Communism and it is likely that his enthusiasm for Burns had an effect on the novelist at a time when Steinbeck was writing about democratic ideals and the trials of the common man.

The current study opens the door for further research into the influence of Burns on other prominent figures of the time, including those within Steinbeck's immediate social

[351] As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

circle. Featuring prominently in the same circle at this time was Steinbeck's first wife, Carol, who owned a copy of the works of Burns. The fact that she recognised and understood the similarities between 'To a Mouse' and her husband's work-in-progress is evidence that she knew Burns's work well. Carol, therefore, represents another source for the indirect influence of Burns on Steinbeck, an influence that can be recognised, to an extent, in some of his later works.

This thesis has examined the assumption, based on the obvious connection between *Of Mice and Men* and 'To a Mouse', that Robert Burns influenced John Steinbeck. I have shown that despite the common critical perception that Burns's poetry was a shaping context for Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* closer investigation suggests there is little empirical evidence for the direct influence of Burns on Steinbeck. He does not specifically mention the poet in any of the correspondence or personal papers consulted in this study. However, it has been demonstrated that an indirect influence is recognisable from a number of different sources, all of which duly shaped Steinbeck's work throughout his life and suggests that Steinbeck was familiar with the figure of Burns and had some knowledge of the poet's work. By examining material relating to early twentieth-century America, this thesis has ascertained the image of Burns that was being presented to Steinbeck. Moreover, the study of the author's work and personal writings, in addition to research of hitherto unused original material, has shown the extent to which Steinbeck and Burns shared similar values and, although the periods in which they were writing were markedly different, their humanity and championing of democratic ideals are apparent and have a lasting importance beyond the societies in which they lived.

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