Finding Steinbeck's Utopia in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat

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Abstract
My thesis will explore the idea of utopia that John Steinbeck intimates through the two novels Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, and how he crafts his utopia in concordant Marxist, social, and ecological frameworks. These two novels possess striking commentaries regarding Steinbeck's views on social status, materialism, and freedom all in conjunction with his larger socio-ecological confines. It is in this symbiotic social interaction that Steinbeck crafts his utopia along with the physical landscape that constitutes Monterey. Written a decade apart, the two novels' structural similarities suggest that Steinbeck maintained a consistent social vision, and that these two novels function as incubators for Steinbeck's idea of a utopic society. Steinbeck's romanticization of his childhood home reflects his left-leaning politics and social theories. The Salinas Valley that he creates is comparable to other utopic fabrications such as El Dorado or Milton's Eden than the town that physically rests in California.

Acknowledgments
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Steinbeck wanted his hometown to be known as the Valley of the World by describing the hopes, disappointments and lives of the fruit pickers, the hobos, the migrant workers and union organizers who lived there. Article Continued Below. Today, the buildings along Salinas' well-maintained downtown of 10 blocks, about a two-hour drive from San Francisco, are lined with antique street lamps and neatly-maintained planter boxes. But the rise of canneries in the early part of the 20th century changed the face of the town and inspired Steinbeck's portrayal of the hardscrabble workers there in his novels Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat. Today, Monterey still sits on the slope of a hill with a bright blue bay on one side and tall dark pines on the other. 1935: "Tortilla Flat"—A small band of Hispanic paisanos in Monterrey enjoy life in Monterrey (Steinbeck's first big success). 1936: "In Dubious Battle"—A labor activist struggles to organize fruit workers in California. 1945—"Cannery Row"—A story of a disastrous party thrown by the inhabitants of a small town in California for their friend Doc. 1947: "The Wayward Bus"—Interactions of a cross-section of people at a crossroads bus stop in California. 1954: "Sweet Thursday"—A revisit of the people in "Cannery Row," taking place after the main character Doc returns at the end of World War II. 1957: "The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication"—A political satire, exploring what might happen if an ordinary fellow was selected to be the King of France.