Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis 20 (2025), z. 4, s. 267–279
doi:10.4467/20843933ST.25.022.22944
www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Litteraria

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Of Sympathy and Love: Mimesis, Narrative, and Togetherness in "Tortilla Flat"

Abstract: Shared narratives and value systems play a fundamental role in the formation of authentic relationships, particularly when built upon collaboration and openness towards the Other. Steinbeck's fourth novel and first critical success, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), offers a promising study in hermeneutical mimesis as it relates to literary friendships, while underscoring the permutational aspects of the symmetry that characterize Paisano togetherness. The friends participate in the Aristotelian *sharing of life*, whereby parity is preserved in order to pursue common goals, thus avoiding a potential fracturing of their circle due to rivalries or antagonism.

Keywords: mimesis, *Tortilla Flat*, friendship in literature

Abstrakt: Wspólne narracje i systemy wartości odgrywają fundamentalną rolę w tworzeniu autentycznych relacji, zwłaszcza gdy opierają się na współpracy i otwartości względem Innego. Czwarta powieść Steinbecka i pierwsza która odniosła sukces wśród krytyków, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), oferuje obiecujące studium hermeneutycznej mimesis w odniesieniu do przyjaźni w literaturze, podkreślając jednocześnie permutacyjne aspekty symetrii, która charakteryzuje wspólnotę *paisano*. Przyjaciele uczestniczą w arystotelesowskim *dzieleniu życia*, w którym zachowany jest parytet, aby dążyć do wspólnych celów, unikając w ten sposób potencjalnego rozłamu ich kręgu z powodu rywalizacji lub antagonizmu.

Słowa kluczowe: mimesis, *Tortilla Flat*, przyjaźń w literaturze

Paisano is not a term of opprobrium but a declaration of relationship.
John Steinbeck, *Letters*

Introduction

"For himself," writes Steinbeck about Pablo Sanchez, "he didn't want Danny's wine, but only his companionship" (1937, 158). Faithful to its etymology, companionship suggests both spiritual and material sharing or breaking of bread (lat. *panis*), while likewise conveying a sense of mutual nourishment of body and soul between friends; compassion follows close behind. Steinbeck observed how poverty during the Great Depression necessitated the move from ipseistic needs and desires towards the strength of a collective identity. Casual readership over the years has treated *Tortilla Flat* as little more than a quaint picaresque detailing the episodic adventures of a group of shiftless Mexican Americans. Invariably fortified with a supply of wine, they shun mainstream commercialism and a Protestant work ethic. Yet the dynamic which binds the Paisanos together functions according to a sophisticated group code that favors economic freedom as well as to a philosophical-moral system built on the immutable value of friendship, which must, come what may, remain untainted by the allure of mammon and other worldly temptations. By unanimous consent and inviolate convention, "they have refused to accept the gross forms of ambition, of materialism, of pride and guilt" (Metzger 1971, 145). In order to mitigate the threat of interpersonal antagonisms, rivalries, and hatred, the Paisano code calls for absolute parity, thus providing fertile ground for authentic relationships in pursuit of shared goals, sidestepping the desire for social advancement or self-aggrandizement. It is this mimetic symmetry *inter pares* that Steinbeck, loosely modelling Danny and his gang on the Knights of the Round Table, reproduces in his fourth but first financially successful book. *Tortilla Flat* endures as a testament to the potency of friendships based on the sharing and exchange of narrative values that foster collaboration, while also maintaining a sense of togetherness among equals.

Mimetic Togetherness

Aristotle devotes two of the ten books of *The Nicomachean Ethics* to the question of friendship (*philia*), delineating its three potential manifestations, all underpinned by a mutual feeling of conscious attachment. The first type demonstrates utility, implying a give-and-take dyad, incidental and transient in nature, whereas the second type is pleasure and emotion-based, often seen among the young whose affections, interests, likes and dislikes ebb and flow. Yet the third type, that of virtuous friendship, assumes that both parties are good people selflessly wanting the good for one another. To be virtuous friends means possessing the requisite, morally sound character traits in addition to, by loving the other, loving themselves, each offering in turn the equal of what they receive (1157b, 196). Aristotle thus recognizes the need for a basic symmetry between friends, commensurate in their

goodness and willingness to help the other. Moreover, disproportioning factors such as wealth, status, or intelligence – friendships between superiors and subordinates – ought to be balanced, “Each one should indeed get a greater share than the other – but not of the same thing” (1163b, 214). In exchange for material help, the poorer friend returns the gesture with a show of respect. The genuineness of friendship might however be called into question when the opposition is too great, such as the elderly requiring care from the young or if a smitten, but unattractive suitor expects requited love.

The notion of symmetry occupies a crucial place in the provocative mimetic theory of the late anthropologist, René Girard. Influenced in part by the work of Freud and his disciple Otto Rank, Girard contends that similarity rather than difference increases the tendency of interdividual rivalry. Sharing the same tastes has the power to unite as in the Aristotelian conception of friendship, but sharing the same desires will divide two people (as, for example, between Arthur and Lancelot over their affection for Guinevere). Regarding internal mediation, he signals that with the proximity between rivals, “the subject will tend to imitate his model as much as his model imitates him… One is always moving towards more symmetry, and thus always towards more conflict, for symmetry cannot but produce *doubles*” (Girard 2017, 57). Although Girard focuses primarily on the negative trajectory of appropriative mimesis, the positive consequences of mimesis have often been overlooked. Only sporadically mentioned in Girardian scholarship, external mediation involves either a spiritual or geographical distance separating the subject and mediator, thereby precluding any possibility for rivalry. The admiration of the subject for the model-mediator remains explicit, the mediation fully disclosed, and the harmony preserved (Girard 1961, 9–10). Paisley Livingston (1992) proposes a helpful qualification concerning external mediation. Desires can be mimetic and non-competitive to the extent that the subject’s behavior is emulative as opposed to doggedly imitative. In an emulative scenario, the fact that A *would like* to be B because of S does not necessarily mean that a) it is even possible nor b) that it remains an existential priority, and furthermore c) that it must happen now. Instead, someone faced with the emulative variety “would like very much to become the kind of person exemplified by the model, and the ensuing episodes of imitation are part of a project aimed at precisely that goal” (Livingston 1992, 51).

Emulation of this type thus cannot exclude the possibility of friendship among mimetic couplings who are spatiotemporally close. Several disciples of Girard have probed the emergence of a creative or positive mimesis built upon collaboration and co-operation.[1] When questioned about the nature of mimetic desire during one interview, Girard clarifies that it is intrinsically good, characterized by an extreme openness to others. It may of course engender conflict, interpersonal rivalry, and violence (negative reciprocity). On the other hand, mimetism can also encourage heroism, devotion, and love in the sense of positive emulation (Adams, Girard 1993, 24). Despite some cognitive frameworks, such as Social

[1] *See* Adams, 2000; Thomson, 2014; Reineke, 2014.

Learning Theory (SLT), broaching the topic of exemplars and motivated learning through the imitation of behaviors, mimetism works nonconsciously and in less instrumental a fashion. It presupposes an ontological curiosity with the other, potentially obsessive in extreme cases, in what Livingston (1992) terms tutelary beliefs, i.e., those which render the model of desire deserving of emulation: "Some of these kinds will correspond to the culturally designed 'roles' or types (e.g. the chivalrous knight, the dandy, etc.); others will be more idiosyncratic composites of such types. The agent adopts the model's desires in order to become the kind of person the model is perceived to be, the assumption being that the individual in question is sufficiently good, if not the best or the only, example of the type" (Livingston 1992, 43). Admittedly, certain models are worthier than others, contingent on a host of situational factors if not personal preferences and more or less accurate perceptions. What stokes the camaraderie between sidekick and hero, ally and confederate, suitor and candidate, is a set of beliefs about the other but in a bidirectional if not symbiotic sort of way. *Friendship*, in this sense, becomes a composite form of mutual dependency together with an openness towards collaboration.[2]

One approach to mimesis merits closer attention in connection with the nonconflictual effect models have on moral agents. Joachim Duyndam (2014) has taken the Girardian framework of mimetic desire and advances a theoretically promising alternative of a hermeneutics-by-doing based on the inspirational narratives of exemplars. Connections develop by coming to know the real or fictional model's narrative structure, circulated in news stories, legends, conversation, or gossip. The "story" the model has to tell is attractive, perhaps even contagious, and the subject would very much like to participate in and / or collaborate with him or her (2014, 253). A hermeneutical relationship emerges in which the values within the exemplar's narrative are *translated* and *applied* in a creative way by the moral agent, respective of the circumstances. In this instance, models do not have to be celebrities, cultural icons, saints or heroes, rather, they can be relatives or friends whose values we desire to emulate and adopt as our own. Duyndam notes that application and translation require deliberation, freedom of choice, and sound interpretation, taking into consideration the potentially multifarious expressions of the exemplar's narrative. What is key, however, is the inclusivity of the hermeneutical relationship: "The exemplar's inspiring appeal makes me, the moral agent, an associate or accomplice, not just a spectator" (254).

Hermeneutical mimesis accounts for many relationships both in literature and in everyday life. However, further elaboration is needed with respect to symmetry, in relationships which involve both agents who desire to emulate the values of

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[2] The bilaterality of desire later turned into a creative partnership is exemplified in William Golding's *Lord of Flies* (1954). In spite of patent differences in class background and physical prowess, Piggy and Ralph rely upon and learn from each other, the former in need of protection against the bullying of Jack and his tribe, while the latter lacks the necessary intellect and rational thought to be an effective leader. Nevertheless, to classify their relationship as strictly one of utility denies the obvious bond of friendship and mutual affection presented in the novel, when compared to the destructive jealously and one-upmanship between Jack and Ralph. *See* Chapter Six in Hojarski2025, 153–174.

the other's narrative structure and which again enforces the reciprocity of attraction. As Bloom (1993) cogently remarks about human connections, "the thought of oneself is inextricably bound up with the thought of another" (14). External mediation is usually associated with a unilateral direction of desire wherein the model does not or cannot reciprocate the emulation. This marks a change in the geometry of desire insofar as it becomes clear that a less one-sided, mutual emulation of narratives appears advantageous, at times morphing into a rapport of equitable friendship conditioned by shared experience. The bidirectionality of desire need not provoke competition, instead collaboration and co-operation between associates locked in an inclusive relationship while pursuing similar goals. I have taken a page out of civil law vocabulary by calling it *permutational*, defined as exchange or barter via its Latinate origin (Black 1910; Lewis and Short 1879). Not only tangible goods are exchanged between people as the legal definition would posit, but the exchange might also be one of narratives, a reciprocal influence of values and value systems. *Permutatio* therefore presupposes a closeness between actors in addition to an openness to form a veritable partnership, in other words, the "sharing of life" (1171b, 240).

The nearest expression of permutational mimesis can be found in Warnick (2008) relative to the intersection of mimetic imitation and the sphere of education. He argues that educational communities need to advocate collective ownership of narratives instead of an exclusivity of ideas among teachers, students, coaches, and so forth. This view fosters the building of partnerships between peers and mentors, while also encouraging positive imitation on an inclusive and equal basis. The aforementioned would likewise fall squarely within Ricoeur's (2019) third thread of happiness, a private wish that finds expression in happiness-as-gift (*bonheur-don*) where the other contributes freely. Ricoeur reverts to Aristotle in an effort to access the key to friendship, punctuating the crucial element of reciprocity, from private wish to a give-take (*donner-recevoir*) relationship that ensures a complementarity of living together (*suzên*) and living well (*euzên*). Girard and Bloom are in agreement that novelists can teach us more about human desires than "amateurish scientists," inasmuch as literature not only succeeds in describing the phenomenon but allows the reader to partake in the "lived expressions of profound experiences" such as friendship, sympathy, and love (Bloom 1993, 18, 30).

Su Servidor

> 'Where is there a friend like our friend?' he declaimed. 'He takes us into his house out of the cold. He shares his good food with us, and his wine. Ohee, the good man, the dear friend.' (Steinbeck 1937, 281)

It is perhaps unsurprising that amidst the economic and spiritual bleakness of the Great Depression that *Tortilla Flat*, Steinbeck's most lighthearted and amus-

ing work, was finally published after a number of editorial rejections.[3] Like the later novels of his sociologically oriented period, Steinbeck records a composite of narratives, testimonies, observations, and gossip, mixed with local color and folklore to depict how a group of Monterey Paisanos elevate friendship over material affluence. Often descendants of respectable families with multiracial ancestry dating to the early years of the Spanish conquest, the Paisanos formed an integral part of the social fabric of Monterey and in the process became the stuff of legends. The author gathered material from diverse sources, firstly, from Spanish teacher Sue Gregory (to whom the book is dedicated), later police officers, his wife Carol, coupled with a slew of personal experiences at Spreckels Sugar during Prohibition where he witnessed Mexican laborers tasked with the most demanding jobs. During his time at Spreckels, large quantities of alcohol mysteriously disappeared as if to presage the friends' dipsomania in the novel (Benson 1984, 41). Despite having an undeniable affinity for Mexico and Mexican culture throughout his life, Steinbeck has been reproached by scholars for painting a stereotypical, if not hurtful portrait of the Paisano community, one of indolence and amorality, alongside assertions of discrimination. In characteristic straightforwardness, Steinbeck rectifies his position of deference in the foreword (never again reprinted) to the 1937 Modern Library Edition: "They are people whom I know and like, people who merge successfully with their habitat… I wrote these stories because they were true stories and because I liked them. But literary slummers have taken these people up with the vulgarity of duchesses who are amused and sorry for a peasantry."

In a letter to his editor, Steinbeck makes explicit that *Tortilla Flat* is a modern-day translation of the Arthurian Cycle according to Malory – "the forming of the round table, the adventure of the knights and finally, the mystic translation of Danny…the association forms, flowers, and dies" (*Letters* 97).[4] The novel likewise demonstrates Steinbeck's "Argument of the Phalanx" developed in 1933 when work began on the novel. His thesis argues that man belongs to the collective of shared desires and struggles, a sort of meta-individualistic Gemeingeist with its own ends. At a time of heightened uncertainty, the Great Depression saw the rise of labor unions, strikes, and increased comradeship among workers. The

[3] The title was inspired by the row of squatters' shacks (affectionately referred to as Tortilla Flat) built in a wooded area outside of Carmel on the Monterey Peninsula. They housed the domestic workers employed by the colony of writers and artists who had settled there after the San Francisco Earthquake (Ariss 1988, 9).

[4] A devotee of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* since childhood, Steinbeck was encouraged to make both the theme and form of *Tortilla Flat* more pronounced, subsequently adding chapter headings to each episode as in the Caxton edition. Yet in the same letter to Mavis McIntosh, he writes: "The book has a very definite theme. I thought it was clear enough… I don't intend to make the parallel of the round table more clear, but simply to show that a cycle is there" (*Letters* 97). Peter Lisca (1981) and Howard Levant (1970) agree that Steinbeck's Arthurian theme operates at a minor if not superficial level and thus does not successfully unify the novel. Nor is it possible, with any greater degree of certainty, to identify the specific character parallels between the Knights and Paisanos. Warren French (1961) claims that, as in his previous novels, Steinbeck is "burlesquing rather than retelling chivalric legends" (56).

characters in *Tortilla Flat* reflect a freedom to make connections, living according to a pattern of love and openness as a single entity, that is, a kind of sharing of life (Benson 1984). The spiritus movens for Danny and his friends furthermore revolves around Steinbeck’s non-teleological thinking or a focus on the here and now as opposed to what might or should be, later finding a more militant expression in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle.* Published five days after his father’s death in 1935, the novel cemented Steinbeck’s reputation on the West Coast, earning him the Golden Medal of the Commonwealth Club of California, yet at the same time eliciting great psychological pressure.

Up until that point, Steinbeck had mingled and drank freely with the Paisanos around Monterey, while himself partaking in a similar social code. His life mirrored theirs – scrounging for food (only occasionally stealing), fishing, collecting driftwood on the beach for fuel, and buying cheap wine by the gallon to share with his equally impecunious friends (Valjean 1975). But critical and financial success from the 1930s onward came at a hefty price: “Poverty and anonymity had given him and his wife a secure position–philosophically, politically, and socially–from which they could view the behavior and values of others…they were free to act, dress, and do certain things because of their poverty that would be absurd if they had money” (Benson 1984, 325). Steinbeck felt a certain loss of freedom that came with literary celebrity, reminiscent of Danny’s predicament after becoming a man of property. Joseph Fontenrose (1963) refers to the spirit of *Tortilla Flat* in terms of a coalescence of unit parts into a single group emotion. The novel, when read as primarily tragedy, serves as an éloge to that coalescence filled with nostalgic blitheness and authentic friendships soon to disappear, metaphorized by the ‘accidental’ blaze of Danny’s inheritance after his death – a “symbol of holy friendship, this good house of parties and fights, of love and comfort” (Steinbeck 1937, 316). Of course, the comedic elements, rendered through a collection of satire, irony, and a mock-epic tone, are linked to worldly temptations that undermine the group code at every turn. The Paisanos strive to preserve a social if not aristocratic dignity when faced with the economic competition, and therefore, against the antithetical value system of their non-Paisano neighbors.

Ownership can be an onerous thing, still worse, a threat to friendship. Following the Armistice, Danny emerges from the army an heir to a small fortune. Universally popular and well-connected, the deceased Viejo’s favorite grandson is the obvious candidate to inherit his two houses. During a late-night amble, he encounters his best friend Pilon and the two break bread (rather, stolen ham and brandy) sharing “half and half,” each according to his gifts. Pilon mimics Danny’s reaction to the news by showing disappointment going so far as to disavow his “once-friend.” Their relationship can no longer be between equals if parity has been abolished. Danny swiftly retorts, “Pilon, I swear, what I have is thine. While I have a house, thou hast a house” (26). But subdued domesticity suits neither of them, for Pilon, the renter without income, will sink into debt, a fate tantamount to slavery. The best Pilon can do is play host to his landlord in Danny’s own house. The narrator explains the symbiosis: “It is impossible to say whether Danny expected any rent, or whether Pilon expected to pay any. If they did, both

were disappointed. Danny never asked for it, and Pilon never offered it" (35). The Paisano group code strictly forbids measuring status according to a traditional understanding of prosperity or the norms of a consumer society intent on accumulating wealth for the sake of wealth. Beyond simply outlining the deontological aspects of friendship rooted in the code of shared narrative values, Steinbeck paints a sweeping view of social and economic freedom. Accordingly, Levant (1970) asserts that although *Tortilla Flat* may not be strictly speaking a work of philosophy, the novel does proffer a successful and "dangerous attack on normal attitudes" (1090).[5]

Fontenrose (1963) considers the Round Table to be a community or living social organism. Symmetry must be preserved at all costs. Pablo Sanchez adds yet another place at the Table, welcomed by Pilon, first to the wine he is carrying, thus saving him from the sin of selfishness, but also as means to share the burden of renting Danny's house.[6] A further guest is invited, the humanitarian and picture of kindness, Jesus Maria Corcoran, whose remaining money from the sale of a rowboat is swiftly requisitioned followed by the inevitable suggestion to purchase more wine with the proceeds. Playful casuistry wins the argument. John Han (2004) has proposed a utilitarian reading of *Tortilla Flat*, suggesting that Danny and his friends adopt a philosophical-moral system based on the pursuit of happiness-pleasure and avoidance of pain-misery. That is certainly true up to a point, as most crimes committed by the friends can in fact be justified through a utilitarian ethical lens. Stealing for the sake of a meal or bending the truth in order to remedy the situation fall within that category. As a means of feeding the eight children of Teresina Cortez, the friends partake in the Robin Hood narrative by raiding the vegetable patch of the Hotel Del Monte "Theft robbed of the stigma of theft, crime altruistically committed – What is more gratifying?" (Steinbeck 1937, 232). Such a perspective also remains helpful when examining the manipulative treatment of the prosperous Torrellis to procure wine and trade goods. Yet the brutal fraternal correction meted out to Big Joe Portagee does not so much have to do with dipping into the Pirate's stash of quarters, but because he broke the social code and thus threatened a precarious status quo, "The bag of money had become the symbolic center of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved." (198). There is just as much irresponsibility with regard to finances as there is responsibility towards the other and their code of conduct. After the first house burns to the ground, Jesus Maria takes it upon himself to make an honorable pledge on behalf of all the friends to never let Danny go hungry.

The mimetic symmetry or "sharing of the good life" therefore entails sharing both responsibilities and pleasures, especially when it comes to the fairer sex. In

[5] Richard Astro (1973) contends that although Steinbeck may have admired the Paisano way of life, shunning civilization and accepted convention, he did not consider their „philosophic-moral" system sustainable, rather short-sighted and able to achieve only „the most superficial of goals" (112).

[6] Writing to his New York theater and film agent, Annie Laurie Williams, Steinbeck makes plain that the Paisanos are not in fact drunks, but that they "like the love and fights that come with wine, rather than the wine itself" (*Letters* 150).

one episode, having cozened a meal out of Mrs. Torrelli, Pablo and Pilon repay, jointly, their "Butter Duck" with "little courteous liberties" (69). Danny, too, is caught in flagrante delicto with Mrs. Torrelli by her husband on one occasion. Perhaps meant as a gesture of gratitude, the friends plan to buy a present for the cuckold Torrelli. Equanimity extends to the act of gift-giving as well. Jesus Maria purchases a pink rayon brassiere with the intention of giving it to Arabella Gross. When she instead runs off with a group of soldiers, it is decided that the brassiere will be gifted to Mrs. Morales by Danny. But anything that perturbs the balance of friendship must be eliminated. Following a sexual encounter with Sweets Ramirez, Danny buys a motorless vacuum cleaner from a pawn shop and offers it to her. The "sweeping machine" makes Sweets the talk and envy of Tortilla Flat. Worried that Danny is spending too much time away, the friends break in and sell the cleaner to Torrelli for a gallon of wine. Metzger (1971) interprets these actions of gift-giving by the amorist Paisanos in terms of courtly romance, accented by virtues such as propriety and performed as love service. Nonetheless, if their friendship according to the group code is to survive, women will only upset the symmetry. That is why Danny's earlier flirtations with Mrs. Morales and Rosa Martin earn the unequivocal disapproval of the friends. For, in the end, "what matters *is* friendship, and, in the nature of *paisano* society, it is restricted wholly to men" (Levant 1970, 1090).

The arrival of the sixth friend at the Table completes the circle. When outside of his chicken coop abode, the Pirate collects scraps of food from restaurateurs, while every morning making his rounds to sell pitchwood to the residents for the sum of a quarter a day. Pilon, moved by a wave of charity, offers him a symbolic cookie which is then broken into seven pieces – one for each of his five dogs, one for his guest, reserving the final piece for himself. Until now, the Pirate had no experience of human friendship and the company's shared "philanthropic frenzy" is handsomely rewarded in foodstuffs – "The paisanos received bounty and made use of it… And their acceptance of his gifts touched the Pirate more deeply than anything they could have done for him. There was worship in his eyes as he watched them eat the food he brought" (108, 112). Much of the language in *Tortilla Flat* indicates religiously inspirative narratives for the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy performed by the Paisanos. In fact, the group code owes much to the theological preference for narrative values which are eternal such as friendship over the fleeting nature of material possessions. "The *paisano* concept of friendship stems from a source that is older and more profound than the Round Table. The *paisanos* are children of Mother Church" (Levant 1970, 1091). The invitation extended to the Pirate had originated with a "weary and anxious angel who guarded their destinies and protected them from evil" (111). As Big Joe sets about digging for hidden treasure in the woods, Pilon reminds his confrere of the implications of doing good: "It is worth while to be kind and generous…Not only do such actions pile up a house of joy in Heaven; but there is, too, a quick reward here on earth. One feels a golden warmth glowing like a hot enchilada in one's stomach. The Spirit of God clothes one in a coat as soft as camel's hair" (134).

In Chapter V, a blessed candle bought by Pablo for San Francisco de Asis sets fire to the house, a conflagration which paradoxically brings the friends closer together since they must now live under one roof, "Now we can be free and happy again" (82). The Pirate's wish to donate a gold candlestick to the same patron saint as a votum for the recovery of one his dogs similarly illustrates the group-man hypothesis while calling attention to the permutational aspects of mimesis. The desire of one becomes the desire of all. Hopes are temporarily dashed when they realize that the hoard will be used to purchase a candlestick rather than more wine. But the collective attitude gradually gives way in favor of a collaborative effort to help the Pirate: "The paisanos were glad they had guarded his money, for even they took a little holiness from the act" (208). Through the assistance of Father Ramon, the candlestick lands a place of honor in the Church of San Carlos. When the time comes to attend Mass, the Pirate, sporting ragged overalls and shoes with holes to accommodate his bunions, has nothing suitable to wear. The friends band together in a gesture of solidarity, lending him a coat and vest (Jesus Maria), a hat (Pilon), a shirt (Danny), and a pair of fine blue pants (Big Joe) for the solemn occasion. Unable to attend themselves, they decide to spend Danny's salvage money on a sumptuous communal feast of hamburger meat and wine in honor of the "little friend" whose "meager wits were supplemented with all the power of Heaven and all the strength of the saints" (207).

Benson (1984) contends that the process of life for Steinbeck was largely a matter of learning. The harrowing narrative in Chapter X proves to be an enriching learning curve. It begins by extolling the virtues of Jesus Maria who "had a gift for coming into contact with situations where good wanted doing" (174). But the plot focuses instead on the story of the corporál and his gravely ill baby whom Jesus Maria rescues from a certain charge of vagrancy at the hands of a policeman. Instinctively, he whisks the two forlorn guests to the house where Danny offers up his fiercely guarded bed. Yet the corporál's silence dismays the hosts. For the Paisanos, narratives are synonymous with knowledge, "gold to be mined," hence the story must be shared (178). Surrounded by fellow veterans, he finally divulges that his wife had abandoned both to take up with a capitán. Father and son flee from Chihuahua to Monterey after a failed assassination attempt by the capitán. At least twenty times a day, the corporál whispers into little Manuel's ear that he will one day be a generál and so the friends take turns doing the same. The baby soon dies, and the friends wrongly assume that the corporál had been raising Manuel to seek vengeance. They even offer to help with the task. Further interrogation reveals something unexpected: "It is the duty of a father to do well by his child…if that capitán, with the silver epaulets and the little sash could take my wife, imagine what a generál with a big sash and a gold sword could take! (185). A *lesson in paternal ethics* as the chapter subtitle announces evolves into a pedagogical narrative for the Paisanos and their honest, but misguided intentions. The corporál instructs the group in the virtue of duty and desiring what is best for his son without falling victim to emotion. And thus, the friends do not hide their admiration of the telling, "They were proud to have known such a man" (186).

Little by little Danny begins to despise the routineness of life. A longing for past freedom gnaws away at him, eventually precipitating his flight into the woods. Every so often news of his backstairs crimes around Monterey reaches the friends who monitor the situation closely. What makes these "sins" particularly unacceptable is that they are committed single-handedly and without collective approbation or benefit, "Gone were the moralities, lost were the humanities… Sad as they were at his moral decay, the friends were not a little jealous of the good time Danny was having" (268). Over the course of a few weeks, the situation deteriorates further as Danny plunders his own house under the cover of darkness, selling off his belongings in exchange for alcohol destined for personal consumption. Rumors abound as to his whereabouts, but the situation reaches a breaking point when Pilon's shoes go missing: "This is not the Danny we know. This is another man, a bad man… This is a crime. They were not very good shoes, but it is a crime against friendship to take them. And that is the worst kind of crime. If Danny will steal the shoes of his friends, there is no crime he will stop at" (269).[7] Venial offenses move into the realm of grievous trespasses not just against the sanctity of friendship, but against fraternal love itself. Each reprehensible act deprives the other of a piece of their livelihood. As if to add insult to injury, Torrelli produces a bill of sale for the house Danny has signed over for the princely sum of $25. The Paisanos cannot stomach, nor even believe for that matter, this latest act of treachery and so they snatch and burn the evidence. The prodigal Danny inexplicably returns with a bag full of rations to share in a gesture of atonement, but also of gratitude for the friends' vigilance.

The enigmatic subtitle of the following chapter, *How Danny was Translated*, hints at a critical juncture within the novel. After his recent crime spree and resulting stint in prison, Danny behaves "listlessly" with no desire to participate in the shared narrative of his friends or that of Tortilla Flat – the town faits divers and idle gossip no longer interest him in the slightest. The narrator speaks for Pilon in reminding the disconsolate Paisano of one important fact: "Thy life is not thine own to govern, Danny, for it controls other lives. See how thy friends suffer! Spring to life, Danny, that thy friends may live again!". In actual fact, Pilon curtly tells Danny "Get off your can" (287). At first glance, this statement would seem to confirm the group-man schematic of individuals functioning as parts of the greater whole, but upon closer inspection, the friends act under the influence of another medium which the "Argument of the Phalanx" cannot account for, that of "altruism more pure than most men can conceive. They loved Danny" (288). To prove their love, the unthinkable happens – the friends go to work, cutting squid to raise money for a bacchanal in Danny's honor. All of Tortilla Flat takes part in the preparations, even Torrelli provides a few gallons of wine *for his friends*. Oral history may have recorded The Party (Steinbeck capitalizes the occasion) as one of the most raucous in living memory. Seized by a drunken fit of madness, Danny snags a table leg to fight the imaginary Enemy worthy of his prowess by charging

[7] Warren French (1961) compares this betrayal of friendship to the seduction of Guinevere by Lancelot and therefore a harbinger of the dissolution of the group.

recklessly into the night. Tilting at windmills tragically lands him at the bottom of a gulch.

The deathbed scene gathers the friends, partygoers, physicians, Father Ramon, and the whole of Tortilla Flat in one place. Danny, the 'man who became a god in Monterey,' will be celebrated in the collective narrative for posterity: "They told little stories of Danny, of his goodness, his courage, his piety" (298, 312). Whereas death may be a personal matter and funerals a social function as the first lines of last chapter purport, the friends regrettably cannot show themselves during the obsequies since they have nothing appropriate to wear. Later that evening, they gather around to reminisce about their friend with an emphasis on his penchant for wine, women, and music. Danny's narrative lives on considering that Pilon in particular "profited by every lesson," while the house loses its value without the "cord that bound" or the "magnet that drew" everyone together (316). This awareness convinces the remaining Paisanos to let an accidental flame set fire to the entire house. Along with the passing of Danny, the symmetry of the mimetic bond of friendship has also been disrupted. What had once been possible as a group united by shared experience and narrative values no longer functions with the same effervescence. We read in the concluding paragraph that "no two walked together," implying that, like the Arthurian fracture, collaboration ceases to exist, and the friends go their separate ways (317).[8]

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[8] In *Travels with Charley* (1962), Steinbeck describes his touching homecoming at the bar of Johnny Garcia in Monterey. During one exchange with his longtime Paisano friend, he asks about the fate of the ensemble of characters from the novel – Pilon, Johnny Pom Pom, Jesús María, and Joe Portagee. Garcia informs "Juanito" that all of them are dead, "It's like we was in a bucket of ghosts." Poignantly, Steinbeck replies, "No. They're not true ghosts. We're the ghosts." (181).

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